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FRANCESCA CARRARA.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

ROMANCE AND REALITY, THE VENETIAN BRACELET,

&c. &c.

————— “ Must we in tears
Unwind a love knit up by many years ?
I cannot break my faith — cannot re-send
The truest heart that lover e'er did lend.”

KING.

—◆—
IN THREE VOLUMES.

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FRANCESCA CARRARA.

CHAPTER I.

“ It is the past that maketh my despair—
The dark, the sad, the irrevocable past ! ”

L. E. L.

OF all the melancholy days consecrated to the memory of the dead, perhaps the most mournful—the one jarring most immediately by strong contrast with its predecessors—is the day when the coffin has been carried from the house, and the light of heaven admitted through the recently darkened windows. Every object looks so unfamiliar. We have become accustomed to the dim atmosphere and the long shadows,—they seemed to sympathise with us. Now, the cheerful sun looks in mockingly; we rejoice not in the face of day; it brings not hope, but memory to our minds; and we only watch the gladdening beams to think that they are shining on the narrow grave.

During Guido's long illness Francesca had

been occupied with the thousand cares which his state required ; to smooth his pillow, to bathe his feverish temples, to bend over him, and to try to lighten the languid hours of his weary waking, had unconsciously beguiled the time. Moreover, though she knew that his disease was fatal—though every morning she dreaded lest he should not live till night, and every night lest it should bring no morrow—still she was not prepared. Death came, and then she knew that in her heart she had believed, she had trusted, that Guido would not die. For the first time in her life, she felt that existence could be a blank. I believe this is a feeling which sooner or later is known to all. Who has not paused upon some portion of their existence, and felt its burden greater than they could bear?—who has not looked back to the past with that passion of hopelessness, which deems that life can never more be what it has been,—with a consciousness that the dearer emotions are exhausted, while in their place have arisen but vacancy and weariness? You feel as if you could never be interested in any thing again—nay, you do not even desire it ;—your heart is divided between bitterness and indifference.

Francesca was conscious that this moral torpor increased upon her every hour. She loathed any

sort of occupation ; she left her books unopened, her lute unstrung ; she took no pleasure in flowers. Lucy one day called her to come and look at a tree, whose late roses were beautiful—a second growth of summer, though summer was gone. Slowly she obeyed the summons. She gazed at the painted leaves—so fresh in colour and in fragrance ; but they gave her no delight. Carelessly she said, “ They are lovely ! ” and turned away. She felt grateful for Lucy’s kindness, who sought to win her attention by every little art that feminine affection could suggest ; but she would rather have been without it. Every thing was an exertion to her, for the animating impulse from within was wanting. She took long and lonely walks through the forest ; but she marked not its autumn splendour,—she only desired in fatigue of body to lose the fatigue of mind.

Rumours of many changes were abroad, and Lord Avonleigh’s return to his paternal domain was confidently reported. Francesca looked forward to it with no other sensation than dread,—new ties, new interests ! she had not energy enough left to form them. Evil had been the experience of her youth,—the bitterness of ill-requited love only those may tell who have known it ! Her memory was laden with mortifications, neglect, and un-

kindness ; and now all better recollections ended in the tomb. Evelyn, how vainly had her heart wasted itself upon him ! and Henriette and Guido were cold in that grave, over whose gloom her spirit perpetually brooded. I have said that such a state of exhaustion and loneliness is one of general experience,—I was wrong. The lots of our days are differently cast. Some few have fallen in pleasant places ; it is folly to say that we share and share alike. I have known many to whom the words of utter wretchedness were as a strange tongue, such as never had fallen from their own quiet lips ; they grew up the darlings and delight of a circle, whose best hope was their happiness ; they exchanged one home for another, girdled round by yet deeper love. To such as these, how many of the melancholy records of the poet's page—and there alone are they recorded—must seem wholly unintelligible ! We need to suffer ere we understand the language of suffering ; but, Heaven above knows ! it is very generally understood. And hence the charm of the sad, sweet page, which idealises our anguish, and makes sorrow musical : if it does not come home to all, it does to the mass.

I have often been told that my writings are too melancholy. How can that be a reproach if

they are true? and that they are true, I attest the sympathy of others and my own experience. If I have just painted a state of moral lassitude, when the heart is left like a ruined and deserted city, where the winged step of joy, and the seven-stringed lute of hope, have ceased each to echo the other; where happiness lies cold and dead on its own threshold; where dust lies dry and arid over all, and there is no sign of vegetation, no promise of change—if I paint such a state, it is because I know it well. Alas! over how many things now does my regret take its last and deepest tone—despondency! I regret not the pleasures that have passed, but that I have no longer any relish for them. I remember so much which but a little while ago would have made my heart beat with delight, and which I now think even tiresome. The society which once excited, is now wearisome—the book which would have been a fairy-gift to my solitude, I can now scarcely read. So much for the real world; and as for the imaginary world, I have overworked my golden vein. Some of the ore has been fashioned into fantastic, perhaps beautiful, shapes; but they are now for others, and not for me! Once, a sweet face, a favourite flower, a thought of sorrow, touched every pulse with music. Now, half my time, my mood is too

troubled, too worldly, and too sullen for song. Alas for pleasure, and still more for what made it pleasure!

But, still more, I regret the energy of industry which I once knew. I no longer delight in employment for the mere exertion—I am so easily fatigued and disheartened. I see too clearly the worthlessness of fulfilled hope. How vain seems so much that I once so passionately desired!—and yet, not always. The more disgusted I am with the present—with its faithless friends, its petty vanities, and its degrading interests—the more intensely does my existence blend itself with the future—the more do I look forward with an engrossing and enduring belief, that the creative feeling, the ardent thought, have not poured themselves forth wholly in vain. Good Heaven! even to myself how strange appears the faculty, or rather the passion, of composition! how the inmost soul develops its inmost nature on the written page! I, who lack sufficient confidence in my most intimate friends to lay bare even an ordinary emotion—who never dream of speaking of what occupies the larger portion of my time to even my most familiar companions—yet rely on the sympathy of the stranger, the comprehension of those to whom I am utterly unknown. But I neither

ordered my own mind, nor made my own fate. My world is in the afar-off and the hereafter,—to them I leave it. Still, the spirit's wing will melt in the feverish exertion, and the lofty aspiration grovel for a time dejected on the earth. Where are the lips from which words have not, at some period or another, escaped in all the bitterness of discontent?—such moods are the key-notes of universal sympathy; and it matters little whether the worn-out feeling, or the exhausted imagination, produced that melancholy, which is half apathy, half mournfulness.

Day after day passed by, and Francesca felt the burden of time more insupportable. To the period of Lord Avonleigh's return she looked with growing terror; for strangely does the fancy exaggerate every subject on which it is permitted to dwell unchecked. The sadness and monotony of her actual state were infinitely preferable to the restraint, to the exertion, of forming new ties, and forcing herself to answer to their duties and to their affections.

Charles Aubyn, the young clergyman who had performed the last sacred offices at the grave of Guido, sometimes deemed himself privileged, in right of his spiritual calling, to break in upon her seclusion with words of comfort, and even rebuke

for such utter yielding to grief; but as yet Francesca could only turn to his remonstrances an uncharmed ear. He found, however, a very attentive listener in the gentle Lucy.

CHAPTER II.

“ Now why

Are her eyes downcast, and his white brow glowing?
 Say, have they vowed — while heaven was witness by,
 With all her radiant lights, like fountains flowing —
 To love while water runs and woods are growing ?”

The Maid of Elvar.

FRANCESCA was one evening returning from her now favourite occupation, if occupation it could be called, namely, of sitting by Guido's grave, lost in profound and gloomy meditation. She would pass whole hours, full of all those fancies which haunt the solitude of indulged grief. Here she recalled all the passages of their former life, till scarcely could she believe that they were gone by for ever! Then, again, she almost thought that the soft and wailing wind which swept mournfully through the sepulchral boughs of the large old yews, had a voice not of this world — was it the inarticulate plaining of her brother's gentle spirit, debarred from intercourse, but still keeping over her the deep and eternal watch of love? She

soothed herself with the belief that the workings of her soul were still known to him,—that her regret and her despondency were but the needful preparation for that other sphere, where now her only remaining hope was garnered.

There are some moods which are singularly profitless; and such is that of allowing the thoughts to wander into combinations of past events with creations never likely to occur. This was the state of Francesca's mind. She employed herself in inventing situations, imagining conversations, recalling facts long since forgotten, in utter waste of the imagination. Ah! the weight of actual existence forces us to dream an unreal one.

It was growing late, for one pale pure star trembled on the verge of the horizon, while the rosy clouds melted away before its calm, clear light, like a spiritual influence refining the passionate hues which are of earth and earth's vapours. The moon, too, was rising—at first, white, like frosted silver; but soon brightening into her own peculiar and lucid radiance.

Francesca passed slowly into the forest—now with the boughs closing over her head, and then opening into a glen flooded with moonlight, whose only tenants were the deer crouching amid the fern. Even her soft step startled them; up sprung the

herd, and sought some further recess, leaving the place to deeper stillness than before.

No one can feel gay by moonlight; the influence is as overpowering as it is solemn. There are a thousand mysterious sympathies, which act upon our nature, and for which we can render up no account; and the power of this mournful and subduing beauty may be more easily acknowledged than analysed. But the young, the buoyant, and the glad, feel it. They wander alone, and the thoughts unconsciously take a tone of tender melancholy. Alas! it is some dim prophecy of the future, with all its cares and its sorrows, that floats upon the atmosphere; and we are penetrated by the effect, though the cause be unrevealed.

Francesca deeply felt the sadness of the hour: more than once she stopped to dash aside the tears that fell thick and fast; and with even more than usual tenderness did her thoughts revert to the dead and to the departed. She felt so isolated — so thrown back upon herself. “How different,” thought she, “would my destiny have been, had Evelyn been less unworthy of the great and true love which I bore him! Good God! is the heart a light thing, to be so trifled with? How has that brief period coloured my whole existence!

I look back to our too happy days in Italy, when I trusted that I was beloved, as if the rest of my life had been a vision, and only that brief space reality. How many new feelings then awoke within me! Till then I knew not how to enjoy—a sudden loveliness seemed to animate all nature; but it was from my own fresh and glad hopes that it came. Ah! did I not love him then? I cannot imagine sorrow or suffering that I could not have endured for his sake,—I never even dreamed of a separate future! How well I recollect the delight with which I listened to my own voice, when I strove to utter words of his language! And now I speak that tongue as if it were mine own,—I stand upon his native soil,—I can see in the distance those halls he so often described,—and yet I know that we are parted, and for ever—parted by his own false tongue and fickle mind! Alas, alas! it is not only his loss for which I weep—nay, for that I do not weep—pride alone would keep me from weeping for one whom I scorn; but I do weep over the warm feelings, the believing hopes—all that was good and kind in my nature, with which he tampered but to destroy. Never again can I love; for in whom could I trust and confide as I did in him who deceived me? The contrast between my past and present is too bitter.

I cannot bear to think on the utter blank of the days to come ; and yet how happy, how very happy, they might have been !”

Francesca's current of thought was at this moment interrupted by the sound of voices near—a circumstance too unusual not to excite surprise ; and one step forward enabled her to see the speakers, though herself unseen. She paused breathless with amazement. The moonlight shone full on the little dell which lay just below the narrow path she was threading, and, falling directly on the face of the cavalier, revealed the features of him who had been so present to her meditation—the features of Evelyn ; and, her hand clasped in his, her slender form bent timidly towards him in that attitude of shrinking yet earnest attention, which is bestowed but upon one subject, was Lucy Aylmer !

For a moment Francesca was motionless, and continued gazing on the two below. It was like the sensation of a dream, in which to move is to awaken. There he stood, the folds of his dark cloak rather adding to the effect of his graceful figure ; the pale moonbeam glittering on his white upraised brow—and the subdued colour which it gave suiting well with the softened expression of his countenance. So had she seen him stand amid

the pine boughs that sheltered their own early meetings; and now those gentle looks were turned on another, and those impassioned words breathed again, but not for her.

Gradually they had drawn nearer to where she was concealed; the sound of their voices rose upon her ear,—another instant, and she would be able to distinguish their words. The idea of being a hidden listener instantly recalled her to herself. With a noiseless step she turned away, and sought the next path, which led her home. Many and bitter were the thoughts which crossed her mind as she returned. No woman can see with indifference the man whom she once loved devoted to another. No: though the heart has long since renounced the creed of its former faith, has awakened to its errors, and reasoned away the once exquisite delusion; still the weakness lingers; and it needed all Francesca's vivid remembrance of Evelyn's treachery and meanness, to prevent her softening almost into regret for her faithless lover. But pride did what reason could not: she felt that she had deserved far other return—and disdain is sorrow's most certain consolation.

CHAPTER III.

“ Tear follows tear, where long no tear hath been ;
I see the present on a distant goal,
The past, revived, is present to my soul.”

BLACKIE'S *Faust*.

FRANCESCA reached their home about half an hour before Lucy ; but so occupied was she with her own agitated thoughts, that time passed without notice. Supper was the only meal which Lawrence Aylmer took with his daughter, when the business of the day was at end, and he had, as he would have termed it, “ a right to enjoy himself.” But he fell into the common mistake of putting enjoyment off over long ; and night usually found him too thoroughly tired out with the day's fatigue to take more than the passive pleasure of silence and rest.

Francesca's abstraction was of such general occurrence that it could excite no particular attention. Lucy, from being afraid of her father, was always quiet ; and Lawrence Aylmer went on with an occasional sentence touching the rumours of

risings and conspiracies in the neighbourhood, quite unconscious of the agitated state of his listeners. Yet Francesca could not but marvel that the unusual absence and trouble of Lucy could escape her father's eye. Shy she always was, but attentive. She listened anxiously to the little that he said, and was careful that any delicacy which had been prepared should be held out as an inducement for him to eat—not so much for the thing itself as a slight mark of her own care. But to night she was quite absorbed. A rich colour mantled like wine into her cheek—a sweet, uncertain smile played about her mouth; and the downcast eyes seemed to repose on the happy and beating heart within.

When supper was over, all sought at once their own chambers. Lucy's farewell for the night to Francesca was even affectionate; it was more so than usual, for her lips overflowed with the tender and excited feelings, whose delicious consciousness was now upon the charmed present. One question from her companion would have drawn forth her precious secret; for Lucy was silent from timidity, not from reserve. But that question Francesca could not ask—she felt unequal to it. She needed the solitude of her own room to compose her scattered thoughts—she dared not trust

herself to say aught on the impulse. She embraced Lucy, and bade her a hurried good-night; and each sought what was to each a sleepless pillow—but sleepless from what different causes!

Lucy was in the flutter of excited spirits, of winged hopes—of all that makes the early paradise of love. To have seen Evelyn under any circumstances would have been a joy to make the treasure of long and after-absence; but to meet him, still unchanged, and still her own, what wonder, in the quiet midnight, that his voice—every word a vow or a flattery—seemed to haunt her ear!—that those flashing eyes arose distinct almost as reality, before which it was so strange, yet sweet to shrink! Distrust is an acquired feeling—we never doubt till we have been deceived; and falsehood in no shape had formed part of Lucy's experience. She would as soon have questioned the truth of her own affection, as one assertion of Evelyn's: she believed him implicitly. Her only idea of fear sprang from a timid sense of her own inferiority. Was it possible that she could be loved by a descendant of that haughty race to which, from childhood, she had been accustomed to yield such deference—to look up to with such veneration?

Evelyn's attachment to her was of a much

more mixed kind. Her affection he certainly was decided on winning ; but what to do with it when won was a point he had considered as little as possible—to chance he trusted the destiny of that young and innocent heart. Just at present, even her slight services were of infinite value. Disappointed in a scheme of personal aggrandisement which he had been led to form on the accession of Richard to the Protectorate, he had rashly engaged in a conspiracy for the restoration of the exiled family. He trusted, in his own neighbourhood, especially during Lord Avonleigh's absence, that his influence would be considerable ; and a rising of some extent had been planned, and a promising scheme laid, to surprise the castle at Southampton.

The recesses of the forest answered well the purposes of concealment, and Lucy was useful both as an unsuspected messenger, and also for the intelligence she was able to obtain. She, poor girl, in the meantime, was lulled in that waking dream,—the dearest and the most evanescent of all the visions wherewith the heart beguiles the care and the sorrow of actual existence.

But if Lucy was restless with the fever of hope and joy, Francesca was as sleepless on her unquiet pillow, from far other causes. The bitter recollections revived by the sudden appear-

ance of Evelyn soon merged in the gloomy monotony which had become the ruling tone of her mind. But not so did her affectionate interest in Lucy. So young, so gentle, so unsuspecting, was her happiness to be another sacrifice?—should she tell her all that had come to her own knowledge—all the painful records of her own experience? And yet it was possible he might love her—love her truly and deeply: if so, of what avail would it be to lower him in her esteem? It were best for Lucy still to gaze with sightless eyes on her idol.

Little good ever came of another's interference; and hours after hours passed by, and Francesca only grew more and more inclined to silence. Perhaps the languor that hung over her somewhat influenced this resolve. She could nerve herself to exertion—she could not speak of the past.

CHAPTER IV.

“ A careless set they were, in whose bold hands
Swords were like toys.”

THAT transient but most lovely hour which follows the sunset was now melting away in the far recesses of the forest. A few gleams of richer hues still lingered in some of the crimson clouds which yet treasured up a sunbeam ; but the great expanse was filled with that pure and pale purple, so soon to merge in deeper gloom, or to tremble into silvery light beneath the radiant and rising moon. The glorious dyes of autumn—autumn, that comes in like a conqueror, but departs like a mourner—were upon the boughs, but lost in that undistinguishing light which subdued all things with its own gentle tinting.

Again, in that little lonely glade, which to them was as a temple, Lucy met that young cavalier, now full of the excitement of his adven-

ture ; while she, alive only to its dangers, would fain have found words to implore him to desist. And yet, for a moment, each yielded to the softening influence of the scene—each forgot that there was a world beyond that singing brook, whose tiny waves went murmuring along, scarce so loud as the beating of the heart. Every bough drooped in complete repose. Not a bird was on the wing to disturb the sleeping leaves—not a wind was abroad to make music among the branches.

Lucy stood looking down on the brook where was outlined the noble figure of her lover ; while he gazed upon her, though he could catch only the profile, and the crimsoned cheek of the averted face.

The moon, which had been slowly ascending, now shone through an open space between the trees ; and the rippling waters of the brook gave back her light in luminous vibrations.

Evelyn started. “ I shall be late ! ” exclaimed he. “ My own sweetest Lucy, farewell !—you shall hear from me to-morrow.”

No longer sustained by his arm, she leant for support against an oak beside ; while he loosened the bridle of his horse, which had been fastened near, and, springing at once into the saddle, in-

clined into the gesture of farewell, and darted off with furious speed along one of the narrow roads.

Lucy strove to raise her hand to wave but one parting sign—down it sank, powerless. At last a violent burst of tears expressed rather than relieved the feelings with which her heart was overcharged; and slowly she turned from the little brook which she had kept watching, as if she expected it still to retain the image of Evelyn. Anxiety preponderated over hope; and it was scarcely possible for Evelyn to encounter a danger not previously conjured up by the alarmed fancy of his mistress.

Leaving her to pursue her disconsolate path homewards, starting at every shadow that fell upon her way, and turning pale at the slightest sound, we will accompany Evelyn on his ride through the forest.

It has often been said, and so truly that one is perpetually tempted to say it again, that nothing exhilarates the spirits like a brisk gallop; and I believe, if ever we feel the enjoyment of mere existence, it is when, with foot in the stirrup and hand on the bridle, the ground seems to fly beneath the fiery creature, which is urged to its utmost speed. The air blows fresh against your face—the scene changes every instant. There is a sense of freedom and of power—a lively stir of all the

bodily faculties, which sends the blood dancing in a cheerful current, little known to the dull monotony of common hours. Evelyn saw the moonlit glades disappear one after another, as he dashed on, careless of the many obstacles that opposed his speed; but the horse which he rode was forest bred—and it is strange with what fearless sagacity these animals thread their native paths.

At length Evelyn dropped the reins; and, leaping to the ground, led his docile follower quietly along, that he might be cool previous to the coming pause. The narrow path suddenly opened upon a little glade, the smallest heath-blossom of which was visible in the flood of clear moonlight which rested upon it. It was the dell of Rufus's stone, around which some dozen dark figures were congregated; but an occasional laugh, and the sound of animated discourse, gave an almost unnatural cheerfulness to the place.

Conspiracies, like all other exercises of human ingenuity, are of very different kinds. The gloomy plots arranged in old Italian halls—the dungeon, sudden and silent as the grave, beneath their feet—the worm-eaten tapestries mouldering on the walls, and many a dark stain on the time-worn floor,—were formed by the Venetian noble in the

black robe, so emblematic of his dreary state, with the rack in perspective, and the dagger and the poisoned bowl, at once his enemies and his auxiliaries. These were very opposite affairs to the reckless and daring attempts of the merry and bold cavaliers, whose inspiration was the red wine, whose faith was in their own good sword, and whose loyalty made up in gaiety and disinterestedness what it lacked in prudence and forethought.

The whole party hastened to greet Evelyn. "What news?" exclaimed one youth, who, in his hurry, allowed the flask which he held to waste its rosy contents on the spotted moss.

"Good!" said Evelyn; "Sir George Booth has surprised Chester."

"A favourable omen for Southampton," replied another.

"And," continued Evelyn, "the King"—at the name, every cavalier took off his plumed cap: and the sudden wave of their white plumes in the moonbeam was like a flash of lightning—"awaits at Calais the success of to-night's enterprise. Southampton seems a safe landing place, and Louis has ordered a choice detachment of troops to attend his will."

"Now, by St. George!" exclaimed Charles Goring, the youth who had before spoken, "we

need no swords but our own to strike for our lawful monarch!"

"Faith, those cursed Roundheads," answered Evelyn, "are strongly placed. No cause, however good, is the worse for help. But now, gentlemen, to decide on our proceedings."

A unanimous exclamation called upon Evelyn himself to speak; and, after a minute's politic pause, he went on to state his plan.

"You are aware that Colonel Mainwaring will to-night attempt to land from the Isle of Wight, with a small but picked body in the disguise of smugglers. A bright light flung in the air will announce the success of their landing, when they will disperse through the town; and one, a cool, bold fellow, whom I know well, will unlock the town gate, and—for he has various talents—hopes, through his influence with a pretty daughter of one of the wardens, to leave unbarred a certain wicket in the postern on the seaward side. Our part is now to ride with all speed to Southampton. We shall assemble in the avenue leading to the town; for though I hear no tidings of troops in the neighbourhood, it is best to be cautious; and, to avoid suspicion, we will separate and seek our rendezvous in parties of two and

three. And now, gentlemen, for the avenue of Southampton !”

A general murmur of assent arose from his little auditory.

“ I will ride with you,” whispered Charles Goring. “ I see that we have each on the uniform of our old regiment ; we have fought side by side before now, and will again.”

Evelyn clasped the hand which was warmly extended to him ; and, turning to the rest, said, “ One health, cavaliers, before we part ! I see you have kept out the night air by a gallant array of flasks.”

Charles Goring stepped forward, and, filling a silver cup, offered it to Evelyn, who, bending on one knee, drank, “ To the health of King Charles, and to a gay supper to-night in Southampton Castle !”

The toast was drunk unanimously, and the glade rang with acclamations. For a moment all was tumult : the hurried sound of steps, the trampling of the horses, while the birds, disturbed from their quiet roost, fluttered amid the boughs, followed by a shower of dry leaves ; and the deer, sleeping in the thickest brakes, started up, and galloped off through the crackling bushes.

“ God and King Charles! is the watch-word,” said Evelyn. “ Gentlemen, forward!”

“ Now, by that God whose name ye so rashly profane, I adjure you to pause, and at least hear the words of his humblest minister, before you adventure forth on your rash and ill-advised expedition!”

For a moment all stood still, and gazed with surprise at the intruder who risked so strange an interference with their counsel. He was a young man, pale with strong excitement, and whose black dress bespoke his calling. Taking advantage of the surprise, which insured him at least transient attention, he continued, addressing himself particularly to Evelyn.

“ It matters little,” and here a flitting crimson passed over his countenance, “ by what means I became acquainted with your present purpose,— Providence directs our weakness to its own wise ends; but I do know that you are bound on an errand of blood, dangerous to others, fatal to yourselves. Let not your rash ambition again bring death into our land. We are now, after sore troubles, at peace; in peace let us remain. What wild and vain hope tempts you to rekindle the flame of civil war so recently extinguished? Why would you again arm father against son, and

brother against brother? Our midnights pass now in security. Do none of ye, as children, remember how ye trembled as the horizon in the distance reddened, and told that the enemy was at hand—and that enemy your own countrymen? For the love of the Saviour, draw not those swords from their scabbards to dye them in English blood!”

But Charles Aubyn (for it was he) had, like most enthusiasts, overcalculated the influence of his eloquence; surprise had alone procured him a hearing, and the bold cavaliers around were little in the mood for a homily.

“Time is too precious to be wasted in words,” said Evelyn, who was the first to recover himself. “Secure the meddling fool!” and Aubyn found himself the next instant pinioned between two of the company.

“I misdoubt me much that he is a spy!” whispered one of the elder cavaliers.

“If so,” exclaimed Goring, “but that I disdain to soil steel on such ignoble prey—”

“Dead men tell no tales,” replied the other, drawing his sword and approaching their luckless adviser.

“Not so,” interrupted Evelyn, who feeling interested, despite of himself, in the calm courage of

the young priest, was reluctant to see him murdered before his eyes, and who had reason of old to know the ferocious temper of his companion. "Leave it to me; I know how to manage these *têtes montés*. Release your prisoner!"

Charles Aubyn was left at perfect freedom; but he stood firm, and gave the young chief a look as collected, if less haughty, than his own.

"Mr. Aubyn," said Evelyn, "for I believe it is that gentleman whom I have the honour of addressing, and whose acquaintance I had hoped to make under different circumstances, I esteem the motives of your interference; but, however opposed our sense of duty, it is as strong as your own. That duty, sir, leads us to peril life and liberty in the service of that earthly sovereign whom we hold to be the representative of our heavenly one. You cannot hope that a few words will change the settled purpose of years. You can do us no good—you may do us harm; but Mr. Aubyn's known character is our guarantee against treachery. You are at perfect liberty; to your honour alone we trust that you will not betray those to whom you owe your life. Good night, sir. And, once more, forward, cavaliers!"

Again came the hurried trampling of the steeds, the crash of the branches, the sound of the receding

hoofs; but in less than five minutes all was still. The moonlight fell on the stone of the murdered king, calm as if its silvery flood had not been broken by shadows of men agitated by bold ambition and daring design, and bound on a fearful service, whose end, to some, at least, must be death!

With feelings of mixed sorrow and mortification, Charles Aubyn stood gazing on the lonely dell. His knowledge of the conspirators' intentions had arisen from an interest, scarcely avowed even to himself, in Lucy Aylmer. Accustomed to loiter round her path—living for days on the hope of a brief “good morrow,” kindly uttered as he crossed her way—he had been the unintentional witness of her last interview with Evelyn. His first impulse was to join the drooping maiden, and conduct her home with at least a brother's care; but his second bore with it the sterner call of a duty:—surely he might warn and expostulate with the thoughtless band, about to throw the chances of life and death, as if they were the dice with which they beguiled an idle evening. He had grown up in a part of the country which had suffered the most from civil war, and its horrors were deeply rooted in his imagination. Too enthusiastic for fear—and, we must add, for discre-

tion—he resolved on seeking the place, and urging the dangers which encompassed them round about; and he reached it almost as soon as Evelyn, who, to avoid the public road, was obliged to take a very circuitous route. The result is already known; and all that Charles Aubyn gained by his interference, was a nearer view of his graceful rival, and a deep conviction of his generosity. No wonder that he left the glen with a hasty step, and sought his own home, fevered with disappointment and regret.

CHAPTER V.

“ You spoke of innovations, and I also believe it is ill to try experiments in states, unless the need be urgent.”

The Buccaneer.

EVELYN and young Goring rode side by side where the road permitted, and, when too narrow, one or other galloped gaily forward. Both were in high spirits, and confident of success.

“ Such a scene,” said Evelyn, “ as I have left behind me in London ! Richard impatient to enact

‘ Retired leisure,
Which in trim gardens takes its pleasure.’

—asking every body’s advice, and, out of anxiety to benefit by all, profiting by none,—ready to proclaim Charles Stuart in the morning, but resolved on keeping his Protectorship to the last at night,—now going to disband the army, and now to dissolve the Parliament, and yet unable to make up his mind to either.”

“ His mind, did you say ?” interrupted Goring ;
“ his mind ! verily it is a piece of most courtier-
like flattery to imply that he ever had one,—it is
very evident that you are fresh from Whitehall.”

“ Flattery,” resumed the other, “ would be a
great waste of time there. No one has suffi-
ciently the upper hand to make it worth while to
flatter ; and really it is a sort of thing too useful to
be thrown away. In the House, Hazelrig and
Vane counterbalance each other. Hazelrig has
all the influence of noise and obstinacy, but he
is a fool ; Vane has that of enthusiasm and talent,
but he is mad. His reign for a thousand years
over the faithful—a consummation in which he
devoutly believes—will effectually prevent his at-
taining any other reign. Lambert’s power is great
with the soldiers ; but others have power, too.
Some run wild, after the same fashion as Colonel
Harrisson, and wait for the inspirations of the
spirit ; others, again, are at the beck of their old
commander, Lord Fairfax ; while the northern
army is under General Monk, who, among our-
selves, is believed to be loyally disposed. By
heavens ! it raises my admiration of Cromwell to
its height, when I think how he swayed these
discordant materials—ay, and by his own strong
hand and clear head alone.”

“ True,” replied Goring ; “ though it is one of those disagreeable truths I purpose forgetting the first opportunity. But from the time I saw him, when a prisoner after the battle of Worcester, his dark brow bent upon us in disdain, rather than exultation ; his calm, clear, grey eye triumphant, but unexcited, which seemed to look through every object which it scanned ; his very gesture a command ; and, though in the first flush of victory, not a muscle seemed stirred, not a look told that this ‘ crowning mercy ’ was more than a rational belief, which had been fulfilled according to his expectation. I felt our genius rebuked before his : I seemed suddenly to know that he was the destiny of England.”

“ It was the wonderful influence that is ever the heritage of a great mind ; but it is an heritage which descends not. Cromwell’s power died with himself,—the elements of ambition, fanaticism, desire of change, and jarring interests, have all gone back to their original chaos. Confusion is the order of the day.”

“ So much the better for us,” exclaimed Goring ; “ you know the old saying :

‘ March winds and April showers
Bring forth May flowers.’

We will take it as our motto.”

“Hist!” whispered Evelyn; “I surely heard some one move in those bushes.”

They drew up hastily side by side, and first looked to their arms, then with a close scrutiny towards the adjacent copse. It was but an instant’s pause; for the branches were dashed aside, and the moonbeams shone on the glittering hauberks of the Parliamentary troops.

“Surrender!” cried the dull harsh tones of the corporal, their leader.

“We must fight for it!” exclaimed Evelyn; and clapping spurs to his horse, and drawing his sword, he made a desperate effort to pass the soldiers. It was in vain: the report of fire-arms startled the horse, who reared and fell backwards, bearing his unfortunate rider to the earth, who was at once surrounded and made prisoner; but with no bodily injury, beyond the shock of the fall. Goring, like himself, had sprang forwards, first snatching a pistol from his holsters, and discharging it at him who seemed to be the chief of the party,—the man reeled, and fell; but his fall was instantly avenged. The young Royalist had broken the circle, and gained the road beyond—the soldiers fired—he leapt up in the saddle, and then dropped forward on the neck of the fright-

ened creature that bore him : one violent plunge flung him from the saddle—a corpse!

The first thing that Evelyn saw when he recovered from the stunning shock of his fall, was his young and gallant companion stretched on the ground. The long brown hair, of whose luxuriance personal and party vanity had been so proud, was already matted by the crimson tide that welled from the fair forehead, into which the bullet had entered; and the features, pale in the clear moonlight, wore the cold and rigid contraction which marks death, and death alone. Evelyn's heart sickened within him. But a moment before, and they had been riding gaily and fearlessly together, full of hope and of life; and now, there he lay, struck to the earth without pity or warning, his career ended, his brave ambition laid low!

“The King has lost a loyal servant, and I a true friend,” muttered Evelyn, as he leant over the body; but the words choked in utterance, and, as he knelt beside, he hid his face in his hands. Little time was, however, allotted for the indulgence of grief: he was roused by one of the soldiers touching his arm, and desiring him to mount.

With what different feelings did he now put foot in stirrup to the last time when he sprung to

horse? His sword was taken from him, his arms bound, and two men went, one on each side, holding the bridle, with which they guided him on his most unwilling path.

“ Good God!” exclaimed he, “ you will not leave the corpse thus exposed in the forest?”

“ If we had a gibbet convenient,” replied the corporal in a sullen tone, “ we would hang the malignant thereon; as it is, the delicate youth must e’en lie on the ground till morning. We have one body to carry already—a good and pious lad, whose life had been cheaply bought by a dozen such as your’s.”

All further remonstrance was lost, for the party who took charge of the prisoner commenced a quick gallop through the forest. At length they arrived at the open road, skirted by a wide heath, bounded by the rising heights of the undulating country. Evelyn cast his eyes round in the very weariness of his spirits, striving, by every outward impression, to fix his attention. He succeeded beyond his hope—ay, and beyond his wish; for even as he looked, he saw a brilliant light ascend high in the air, burst into a multitude of sparkles, and then die away in the far blue sky. He knew that Colonel Mainwaring had effected a landing. To think that he should have been so

successful, and himself a prisoner! He cursed his ill-luck. "That very light, which I hear the fools behind me taking for a falling star, and drawing portents from already, might well serve for an omen of my present enterprise. It has been carefully concealed, and studiously prepared,—it sets out on its radiant ascent full of bright hopes; suddenly it bursts, the glittering sparkles die away, and all is calm and dark as before. The emblem of this enterprise—why, it is the very emblem of my fate! Pshaw! there are many follies in this world, but none so foolish as regret. At all events, I am not dead yet; though rather nearer his skeleton majesty's presence than I at all desire. Well, I wonder whether they will hang, head, or shoot me? Now really the illustrious house of Evelyn ought to be complimented with the axe; but these beggarly Roundheads have no idea of a gentleman's feelings." And, to the infinite displeasure of his conductors, the young cavalier began humming a popular Royalist song.

CHAPTER VI.

“ You shall know all to-morrow.”

Rookwood.

FRANCESCA and Lucy had both passed the day in that most uncomfortable state of each desiring to make her inward thoughts known to the other, and yet neither having the resolution to begin. Like all persons who have suffered much, there was something of languor about Francesca. She dreaded either feeling or inflicting pain ; she shrunk from emotion ; and though a dozen times, despite of her settled plan of non-interference, she resolved on speaking to her companion ; yet, when the opportunity arrived, she involuntarily put it off till some other more favourable occasion, which never came. Lucy's was only a natural timidity, a girlish shame of owning that she had a lover. The ice once broken, she would have taken the usual pleasure in talking

about him ; but to begin was so very difficult. On her return home from meeting Evelyn, it was impossible for one so little versed in duplicity, so little accustomed to self-restraint, to conceal her anxiety and depression. She sat in the window, seemingly occupied in watching the moonlight touching with pale the crimson of the few late roses that clustered round the casement ; but the large tears fell upon the flowers, and the deep-drawn breath betrayed the scarcely checked sob.

Francesca, who, since Guido's death, had shrank from the contemplation of natural loveliness, was seated in a large arm-chair, which stood in the darkest corner of the room, silent, sad, but less abstracted than usual ; for her thoughts were busy with her companion. She marked the colourless cheek, the mournful attitude ; and, rising from her place, approached Lucy, took the other half of the window-seat, and bending kindly towards her, said, " You are weeping, dear Lucy ; what is the matter ?—can I do any thing for you ? "

There are moments when a kind word or look goes direct to the heart : these did so with Lucy, who, throwing her arms round her friend's neck, gave way to a violent burst of tears.

" Poor child ! " exclaimed Francesca, soothing her with a sister's affection. " Lucy, love, do not

mind me—I think I know much of what you can tell me.”

Lucy raised her face, carnationed with the most vivid blush, but hid it again. She strove to speak, but an inarticulate murmur was all that her tremulous lips could produce. Before Francesca could speak words of encouragement, fit answer to that mute but imploring look, their whole attention was aroused by the trampling of horses in the yard, a loud knocking at the door, and voices harsh and authoritative.

Lucy's own knowledge filled her with fears. “For God's sake,” exclaimed she, “let us go and see what is the matter!” Her strength was unequal to the effort, and she sank back; while Francesca, who was quite ignorant of her secret cause for apprehension, attributed her alarm to her feverish state of excitement, so susceptible of sudden fears; and sprinkling the dewy leaves in her face, awaited her restoration with a tender calmness, soon to be destroyed.

“I was afraid you would be frightened,” said Lawrence Aylmer, opening the door abruptly. “We do live in sad, troubled times. A party of the Commonwealth's troops have just demanded shelter for the night, and they have brought a prisoner with them. I do not at all like my

house being turned into a jail. Perhaps you had better not leave this chamber till you go to bed."

Francesca felt Lucy tremble from head to foot; she could scarcely support her; and—for with strange rapidity does the truth flash upon the mind—a terrible belief had taken possession of herself. She strove to ask the question, but her voice failed her. Lawrence Aylmer was too hurried to notice the singular silence with which his communication was received, and turned to leave the room. The agony of anticipated suspense rose in all its horrors before Francesca—"Best to know the worst—" She gasped for breath; but the effort succeeded—"who is the prisoner?" asked she, in a forced, unnatural voice.

"Mr. Evelyn. He is brought here to await Major Johnstone's arrival, when, they say, he will instantly be shot."

The door closed after him lightly; and yet it was like a peal of thunder. It was followed by a sudden fall—she turned, and saw Lucy stretched insensible on the ground.

Francesca felt at first as if she had no power to succour her. Evelyn so near—a prisoner, and about to die—might well absorb every other thought. She wrung her hands in utter hopeless-

ness ; but one glance at the wan and inanimate form before her recalled her in a measure to herself. She raised Lucy's head on a stool near ; and recollecting that in one of the cabinets there were still some drops which were wont to revive Guido, she hastened to procure them, and succeeded in pouring some down Lucy's throat, who awoke first to life, and then to life's fearful consciousness. All concealment, all restraint, was over ; she flung herself at Francesca's feet, and frantically implored her to save him. It was the despair of a child, who believes there is no bounds to any power but its own.

The exertion necessary to soothe and subdue Lucy's passionate sorrow was the best composer to Francesca's own agitation. One idea took possession of her imagination. " Was it not possible to contrive his escape ?" To effect this, the utmost presence of mind was needful ; they required calmness and deliberation. But the first hint of such a plan so overwhelmed Lucy with a paroxysm of joy, as uncontrollable as her previous alarm, that at first it seemed almost hopeless to expect assistance, or even obedience, from her. Gradually she became more collected, and at last they were able to consult together as to the best measures for communicating with the prisoner, and evading

the watchfulness of his guards. Francesca slightly mentioned that she had known him in France, reserving the particulars till some later period; and Lucy was too engrossed in the present to have one word to say of either past or future.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Look to your prisoner, there ! ”

“ AND now, my dearest Lucy, collect yourself, for all depends upon our own resources.” Such were the whispered exclamations with which Francesca cheered her trembling companion, whose courage was not heightened by the darkness and stillness around them as they proceeded on their hazardous enterprise.

We have before mentioned that Lawrence Aylmer's dwelling had been in former times a monastery, and abounded in small rooms and long passages, while a large portion was entirely uninhabited. The chamber in which Evelyn was confined was one only employed in drying herbs, and was situated at the end of a long gallery. With this their rooms communicated, though by a back staircase never used.

There is something very catching in fear; and as they passed through gloomy passages, whose only tapestry was the spider's web, and whose boards creaked at every step, while their lantern threw around fantastic shadows, and scarcely light enough to enable them to find their way, Lucy clung to her companion's arm, and with difficulty suppressed the scream which some sudden darkness or unusual noise forced to her lips. Even Francesca felt her heart die within her, so contagious was Lucy's terror. And, truly, strong nerves are required to steal at midnight through a lonely suite of rooms, haunted by vague imaginings, and all the terrible superstitions and records accumulated on the past. Connected with the dark and narrow rooms, the cells of former days, through which they had to find their way, was one of those ghastly legends belonging to far-off time—they are too horrible to be believed of the present.

There are some human beings who seem marked out for misfortune—an evil influence attends them till laid in that early grave to which it has hastened their progress; and such a history was remembered of the luckless nun, whose first forced and then broken vows were awfully punished by a living sepulchre. It was a story to be told on a

winter evening, till the curdled blood of the hearers made them ready for that fear which follows close upon horror; and it was said that a dark spectre flitted along that lonely gallery, and that the November wind had more than once brought wailings not of this world. The tradition rose to Lucy's scared fancy; and supernatural terror was added to real, till at length, if less frightened, Francesca became almost as agitated as herself; and, in spite of every firmer resolve, started as the air came harshly through the many crevices, and as the uncertain shadows swayed to and fro. Much as they dreaded encountering the sentinel, when they arrived in the gallery it was a relief to hear his measured step, and have their alarm take that tangible shape which required exertion. In an instant the quick eye of the practised soldier caught their shrouded lamp, and "Who goes there?" rang upon their startled ears—startled as much as if they had not expected such challenge.

Lucy at once recognised the man's face. He had been a servant about the farm, and indebted to her for many a little act of kindness to himself and his family. Her courage rose with the idea of not having to address a stranger. "We are friends, Irvine," said she; "and fortunate do I

consider myself in having to address a friend in you. We desire to see your prisoner, and a stranger might have refused even that slight request; but I can rely on your good-nature." So saying, she attempted to pass.

"No, no, young lady," exclaimed the sentinel, standing immovable before the door. "I honour your father and his daughter too much to let you in on any such errand. What but the exchange of some vain love-token can lead you to seek the presence of that gay and noble cavalier? I know the ready falsehood of such, where one so fair as yourself is the object. Maiden, I will not aid you to lay up sorrow for the future."

Lucy shrunk back, utterly abashed by this unexpected repulse. Involuntarily she held out the purse which had been destined as a bribe, but the words which would have proffered its contents died on her lips. Francesca, too, remained silent for a moment; but Evelyn's life was at stake, and she roused herself. "It is for me," said she, advancing, and throwing up her veil, "that Lucy Aylmer desires admission to Mr. Evelyn; she is but my companion, for I desire not an unwitnessed interview. But I do implore you, as you hope for mercy at your extremest need, to let us pass. I do not talk of recompense, though I

have gold in abundance; but I entreat of your humanity to let us enter. Would you spend your own last hours in dreary solitude, uncheered by a single farewell to those the dearest to your heart? Would you die, if far away from them, without sending them one remembrance or one blessing?"

There was something in Francesca's look and manner that availed her even more than words: command seemed so much her right, that it was scarcely possible not to yield.

"Pass on," said the soldier, opening the door of the apartment, and gazing earnestly on the pale, beautiful, and foreign-looking face."

"Nay, my friend, no refusal—it is no bribe, for it won you not to grant my prayer; but I have now no other way of shewing my gratitude."

Drawing her veil closely around her, and taking Lucy's arm, though it was her own that gave the support, she entered the room, and closed the door; when, listening for a moment, she heard the monotonous and heavy tread of the soldier echoing through the passage.

"He sleeps," exclaimed Lucy, bending tenderly over Evelyn—loath, even in that extremity, to waken him.

"You must rouse him, dearest—every minute is precious."

Perceiving that Lucy still hesitated, she approached the sleeper, and with some effort removed the arm which supported his head, at the same time calling him by name. Evelyn started to his feet in a moment, and his hand mechanically sought his sword—the discovery that he was unarmed seemed to recall his recollection instantaneously—he paused just to take breath, folded his arms, and turned fiercely round to face his supposed enemy. His glance fell upon Lucy Aylmer. “My sweetest Lucy!” exclaimed he, “this is being in company with an angel sooner than I expected.”

Her only answer was a burst of tears, and a gesture towards Francesca, entreating her to speak, which drew Evelyn’s attention to her companion. Pale and agitated, the young Italian felt herself incapable of utterance; and Evelyn stood fixed to the ground when he recognised his visitor. “The Signora da Carrara!” he ejaculated; and then paused, half surprise and half embarrassment.

Francesca was the first to recover her self-possession; and coldly and calmly approaching the prisoner, said, with a voice to which pride gave firmness, “Mr. Evelyn, time is now too valuable to be wasted in idle explanations; I have

only to say that Lucy Aylmer and myself have arranged a plan which will, we think, insure your escape. You must pass for me—the dress I wear will be sufficient disguise—and I will remain in your place till the arrival of Major Johnstone,”—Evelyn started at the name,—“who can have no motive in detaining me prisoner.”

Without waiting for a reply, she unbound the veil from her head, and took off the loose black novice's robe, which she had put over a gray stuff dress similar to that worn by Lucy. “I have,” added she, in a saddened tone, “worn this costume for weeks. I think, on my first arrival, the very man who keeps the door saw me in it; it can therefore excite no suspicion, and its wide folds afford ample concealment.”

“Good God!” said Evelyn, “and do you think so basely of me as to suppose that I would leave you in my place, exposed both to danger and insult?”

“I apprehend neither,” she replied; “the bitterest fanatic of them all would scarcely stain his hands with a woman's blood; and as to insult, the grave and severe character of the officer expected is my best security. But make haste—there is a faint glimmer already in the east; and if the day once breaks, you are lost.”

Without awaiting further reply, she began to arrange the cumbrous drapery.

“Dearest Evelyn,” whispered Lucy, in so tremulous a voice that even his ear could scarcely catch the words, “for my sake, do not refuse.”

A firm determination usually effects its purpose, and the young cavalier at length allowed Francesca to proceed to the execution of her purpose. The disguise was complete—the novice’s garb entirely shrouded his figure, and the long veil equally concealed his face.

“Now, take Lucy’s arm—and remember,” continued she, “that you are overcome with emotion. Ah! one thing we had nearly forgotten—those riding-boots will lead to instant detection. I had put on the slippers of”—she could not articulate the name of Guido—“over my own; you must substitute them for your rougher array.”

Evelyn obeyed, and then, turning hastily towards her, exclaimed, “Lady, you cannot dream how unworthy I am of your heroic kindness; but the ill I have done I may yet repair, and, little as you may now suspect it, your own future happiness is one great inducement for my thus attempting an escape.”

“Mine!” murmured Francesca with a bitter and scornful smile; when, seeing that Lucy was

employed in fresh-trimming the lantern, she whispered, "think rather of that gentle creature yonder—so young, so good, so innocent, let her not be a sacrifice."

"Ah! I love her," said he in the same whispering tone. "If not my wife, she will never be more to me than the loveliest dream of my existence."

"A dream," thought Francesca, "which, alas! will cost her happiness."

But there was no time for further parley. Francesca threw round her Evelyn's cloak, put on his plumed hat, drew his glove on one hand, and leaning her head upon it, might well, to a casual glance, have seemed the cavalier.

Evelyn and Lucy opened the door of the chamber. They passed on, and the sentinel looked in, and saw, as he thought, his prisoner. "I must wish you good night for my friend and myself—poor thing!" said Lucy, in a low voice.

The man touched his cap respectfully, and with slow steps they proceeded along the gallery. How distinctly could Evelyn feel the heart of the terrified girl beat against his arm! At last they reached the extremity—the heavy door swung to after them. Lucy tried to draw the bolt, but her hand trembled too much, and her companion was

obliged to perform the task. "Quick!" whispered she, and rapidly they threaded the deserted rooms. "You can throw off your cumbersome disguise here," said Lucy, though the words could scarcely be distinguished, from her excessive agitation. Evelyn hastily caught up a cloak and cap laid ready for him, and a few minutes brought them into the sitting-room. "This window opens on the garden—go straight along yon shadowy walk—the mound at its end will enable you to mount the wall—you can spring down, and then your path lies direct to the forest. Oh, make haste—God bless you!"

He clasped her tenderly to his heart, and was gone. She watched him through the walk, for there was just a faint light that outlined his figure on the still dusky air. Almost before she drew her suspended breath, he was lost among the trees. She raised her hands with a mute gesture of gratitude to Heaven, and sank on the window seat.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ How felt the maiden in that hour ? ”

SCOTT.

THE first few moments after the door closed upon Evelyn and his companion were passed by Francesca in a state of horrible anxiety ; every instant she expected to hear that the sentinel had discovered the deception. She counted in her own mind the steps along the gallery ; at last she heard, as those whose senses are quickened by some strong excitement can hear, the door at the end of the passage close ; then all was still, save the measured tread of the soldier passing to and fro. With an intense feeling of composure and relief, she let her head sink on her arm ; and, while a few large but quiet tears fell almost unconsciously, remained for a time only alive to the repose that follows when the nerves have been overwrought, and mind and body taxed to their utmost ; the

feverish restlessness which is sure to succeed exhaustion was yet to come.

The noise of relieving the guard at the door of the chamber first roused her. Some one looked in, but, apparently satisfied, did not enter; and again all was silent, save the tramp of heavy steps up and down the gallery. Francesca gazed around; the dim lamp was flickering in the socket, and spread a far black shadow; a cold gray light came through the dusty and broken windows, while the unfurnished and disconsolate chamber, floor, and walls, discoloured with neglect and time, added to the gloomy influence of the scene.

The first struggle between light and darkness is a dreary hour,—the air is so raw, so cold; the want of rest is then most severely felt; sleep avenges itself for its dismissal by sending stupor in its place; and the relaxed nerves and worn out spirits presage the misfortunes which they yet lack strength to meet. All the annoyance to which she might presently be subjected, all the misconception to which her conduct was liable, rose gloomily upon her mind. With feverish impatience she watched the objects grow more and more distinct, while the perpetual pacing of the sentinel outside seemed insupportable to her jaded hearing. A rosier tint came upon the atmosphere,

and at length a sunbeam fell upon the expiring lamp—its glad and golden radiance was a mockery, and the wan flame perished before it. Sounds now began to break the monotony of the soldier's steps; first, a low chirp rang through the boughs, and soon the songs of the many birds filled the air with the music and cheerfulness of morning; while through the shattered lattices came the rich flush—the crimsoned beauty of an autumn dawn.

“Major Johnstone must soon be here!” and, in spite of herself, Francesca trembled, though more from feminine timidity than alarm. In the hurry and fever of the previous night, she had not given a thought to the consequences—now they arose in painful array before her; her very courage, as concerned danger, rather heightened than diminished their annoyance—had she been more fearful, she would have been less embarrassed; love, too, would have supported her by its own engrossing nature; but she had acted solely from an impulse of high-toned generosity. When she could assist Evelyn, she disdained to visit upon him aught of personal resentment.

As the morning advanced, her anxiety increased. Suddenly an unusual noise broke in upon the singing of the birds;—surely it was the trampling of horses' feet! She held her breath to

listen, for she could scarcely catch it;—yes, there certainly was the sound of voices, confused and distant,—then all was still again. A few minutes of agonising suspense succeeded; then came the tread of heavy feet along the gallery. She heard a loud, harsh voice distinct above the others, though, of course, she could not distinguish the words. The door of the chamber opened, and some one entered slowly, and approached the table. She felt, though her face was bowed upon her hand, that the darkness of his shadow was upon her.

The visitor paused; then, shaking her roughly by the arm, exclaimed, “Up, thoughtless sleeper! there is but brief space between thee and eternity: give that space to thy God! Great as are the injuries now about to be requited on thy own head, I would not have thee depart this life with no prayer on thy lips for forgiveness.” He drew aside the cloak, and all concealment was over. The young Italian rose from the seat, pale, but resolved; and if her hands were involuntarily clasped in the timid supplication belonging to her sex, her dark eyes were filled with the fiery pride native to her heroic race. The surprise was so great, that for a moment Major Johnstone neither spoke nor moved, but remained gazing on the

beautiful face so suddenly presented to his view, as if it had been the head of Medusa, and had turned him to stone. But he was too used to the changes of his stirring time for surprise to last. His brow darkened, and his mouth contracted with a fierce expression of rage, —

“Where is the prisoner?” demanded he, in a tone scarcely audible.

“Far beyond the power of his enemies,” replied Francesca.

“You contrived his escape, and remained in his place; you are therefore, doubtless, ready to meet the penalty which awaited him. I give you five minutes to prepare for death!” and, turning away, he began to pace the chamber with rapid steps.

Francesca felt, as who but must, the blood recede from her heart; but her self-possession deserted her not.

“Why,” thought she, “should I care to die? Who do I leave behind to regret me? Life is my only link with life. Isolated and wretched, why should I care how early that is snapped? Guido, we shall meet sooner than we deemed!” and, leaning on the back of the chair, she hid her eyes with her hand, and strove to fix her thoughts on a far and other world.

The republican officer had expected a burst of womanish terror, and had nerved himself in advance for passionate appeals ; but Francesca's quiet submission and calm resolve at once surprised and touched him. His words were but a threat, which, to do him justice, he never dreamed of carrying into effect ; but he had hoped, in the agitation and fear of the announcement, that he should be able to gather such particulars of the prisoner's escape and destination as might lead to his recapture. Her perfect beauty, her noble air, and her stately composure, inspired him with a respect and interest which influenced him unawares ; and when he next spoke it was in a gentler tone.

“ It must have been some strong motive which induced you thus to peril your life, and to set at nought the laws of the land in which you dwell. But why do I say strong motive ? There needs but one for your weak and ill-judging sex—the fair face of the young cavalier, and perchance a few honeyed words, soon throw aside all restraints of duty, age, and of decency. Mr. Evelyn was your lover ? ”

“ Sir,” said Francesca, raising her eyes, “ the meanest hind in yonder field is an object of as much interest to me ; I had no motive but compassion ; and I do now deem myself justified in

aiding a fellow-creature to escape from a violent and dreadful death.”

“ And so,” exclaimed he, angrily, “ for a foolish, vain, and womanish fancy—compassion, as you call it—you have let loose a firebrand on this unhappy land, and defrauded a vengeance as just as ever exacted the fearful penalty of blood for blood !”

“ I will but answer,” replied Francesca, “ in the words of your own holy creed,—‘ Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord ; I will repay.’”

“ Maiden,” interrupted Major Johnstone, pale with rage and a yet deeper feeling, “ it is but a little while ago, according to ordinary reckonings—but a miserable eternity to the miserable—that I dwelt, a man of peace, in a happy home—happy in content and affection. In one night that house was burnt to the ground—ground reddened with the blood of those nearest and dearest to me. I was left without one kindred tie on earth ; and stood next morning beside the blackened heap which had been my happy, happy house, with but one thought of the future in my heart. Maiden, that was vengeance !”

Francesca could not speak, but her eyes fully showed the intense sympathy the story had awakened.

“ That ruin—that work of death—was the act of a midnight revel, the deed of those who sat at my board, and who deemed it only too great an honour for the scorned Puritan to perish by their hands. Your young cavalier was the foremost of those brawlers. One dear to me as a son fell by his sword. Others of that merciless band have fallen before me one by one, but he has eluded my pursuit. God delivered him unto my wrath, and lo! the vain foolishness of a woman has again deferred that righteous judgment which I feel written in my inmost soul it is given unto me to execute ! ”

“ Alas ! ” exclaimed Francesca ; “ I do not plead to excuse the cruel injuries to which an unnatural warfare has led ; but, for your own sake, be merciful ; — the heart knows no peace like forgiveness. ”

“ What know you of forgiveness ? ” interrupted the other. “ What injuries have you had to pardon ? Have you stood amid the dead and the dying, those for whom you would have poured forth your heart’s best blood ? ”

“ There are other sorrows than those which are the heritage of the sword—other injuries than those wrought by the red right hand ; and life is more easily parted with than happiness. ”

“ And of that,” exclaimed the other, drawing the inference more rapidly than Francesca had anticipated, “ yonder truant malignant has deprived you ? ”

“ Nay ! ” replied she, for her pride revolted at the conclusion to which her own inadvertent words had led. “ Mr. Evelyn has over me no influence now,” added she, in a faltering voice ; for, however painful or humiliating, Francesca was too little accustomed to falsehood to take refuge in its meanness. But their conversation was interrupted by a sudden noise in the gallery. The door was thrown hurriedly open, and Evelyn was again brought in a prisoner.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Who
May well be said to represent his brother,
For when you see the one, you know the other.”

LEIGH HUNT.

THE moment Major Johnstone's eye fell upon the prisoner, it kindled with a fierce and terrible joy, like that of a wild beast about to spring upon the prey devoted alike by rage and hunger. A deadly whiteness spread round his mouth, rendering still deeper the blackness of his brow. No man could meet its dark, unrelenting frown, and not feel that, if there rested his doom, it was indeed sealed for ever. For a moment Evelyn quailed before that fearful gaze; and yet his emotion was not fear, but as if some painful memory was suddenly awakened—a memory to be dismissed as soon as possible; or, if not forgotten, at least to be braved. On his entrance into the room, the soldiers had released his arms, though they stood with their stern impenetrable faces, too harsh for

any expression, fixed upon him in mechanical watchfulness of any attempt at an escape.

Francesca leant, pale and breathless, against the chair, looking on the scene before her with that fascinated gaze which marks the progress of the dreaded evil it has become utterly hopeless to avert. The two enemies confronted each other, Johnstone's rigid features working with a slight convulsion, and his large grey eyes gleaming with that lurid light ever associated with insanity; and assuredly with him the incessant dwelling on one thought had had its usual effect of unsettling the mind which undergoes that perilous trial. Vengeance had been the sole object of his existence; it was now about to be gratified—and the emotion of such a joy is awful as death. The young cavalier looked the most indifferent of the two; his arms were folded, as if the attitude were only studied on account of its grace; the eye wandered carelessly round; and a scornful, or what is best expressed by the common word audacious, smile curved his lip. The republican officer felt his anger goaded by the insolence of his careless adversary. This time there was no recommendation to think of that God into whose presence the prisoner was so soon about to enter. His lip trembled, a slight spasm distorted his

mouth; and even the trained and hardened soldiers started at the hollow and unnatural voice in which their commander gave his orders.

“Habakkuk, go you first, and marshal a file of our picked carbines; you,” said he, turning to the others, “follow me, with the prisoner.”

No woman could stand by and hear such an order given without an attempt at supplication, however vain. Francesca sprang forward, and, throwing herself at Johnstone’s feet, implored him to shew mercy. He raised her with the iron grasp of a giant, as strong and as pitiless.

“Madam, this is no scene for a female,” was his only reply.

Francesca’s appearance seemed to move Evelyn. He stood as if struggling with his feelings; at last his resolution was taken, and, stepping forward, he addressed Major Johnstone.

“I believe, sir, even the tyrannical authority now so unjustly exerted would scarcely condemn a gentleman of birth and honour to die without a few minutes’ preparation. I ask but some brief words with yonder lady; and they are for her sake, not my own.”

“Speak!” said the officer.

“Only for her ear,” resumed Evelyn.

“And so plan another escape, through some

of the cursed passages with which this relic of popery abounds?"

"I give you my honour."

"Trash!" exclaimed Johnstone, his black brow growing yet blacker with rage at the delay. "Behold yonder window—lead the lady thither; I can there see, though I hear you not. So courtly a gallant as yourself knows how to whisper."

"Doubtless," said Evelyn, acknowledging the compliment by bowing low; and, advancing to Francesca, he led her towards the window. Precious as the time was, he nevertheless hesitated when the gloomy shadow of Major Johnstone fell between the two.

"I give you but ten minutes, and four are gone;" and again he withdrew out of ear-shot.

"Yes, I must speak; and though I do not—cannot hope for your forgiveness, I must tell you, Francesca, how cruelly you have been deceived. I cannot die with a lie on my soul; but I am not he whom you take me for."

Francesca gazed into his face. She thought the shock of his situation had bewildered his reason; but he met her look calmly—firmly, and continued:

"It was my brother that you met in Italy; our likeness is so great, that apart we are often mis-

taken the one for the other. I heard him speak of you, though our meeting in France was the effect of chance. Thither he followed you, saw you talking to me at the theatre, and believed that I had supplanted him. Reproach was alien to his generous temperament; he commended you to my dear love, and left Paris."

Francis Evelyn paused, for though he expected agitation, he was not prepared for the shock which his words inflicted. Francesca sank senseless at his feet. The noise of her fall called the attention of the others. Alive to every chance of escape, fearing to see his prisoner vanish through some concealed door, Major Johnstone rushed forward. On observing the state of Francesca, a gleam of commiseration passed over his severe aspect; he aided Francis to raise her, and, beckoning one of the soldiers, gave her into his arms, and bade him carry the still insensible girl to the family. The man obeyed, and, with a kindliness which indicated a gentler nature than his rugged look promised, bore her carefully as a child from the chamber.

"Are you ready, sir?" said Major Johnstone.

"Not yet!—not yet!" exclaimed Evelyn, with an appearance of agitation, which he strove in vain to suppress. "I ask but a very, very brief delay;

but I have done a grievous wrong to yonder noble creature, and to one worthy as herself I must repair it. You know my brother?"

"I do; and marvel how he can be brother of thine."

The rebuke passed unnoticed, and Francis hurriedly continued:

"I ask but to write a few lines to him. I shall place it unsealed in your hands, so that you need fear no treason; though I trust that even a Round-head may have honour enough not to read it; and to that honour I must trust for its delivery."

"I reckon not," replied his companion, "that worldly and vain honour which you set up as an idol, and worship beyond your God; but for Robert Evelyn's own sake, that letter shall reach his hands in safety."

Writing materials were soon brought, and Evelyn commenced his epistle: it ran thus—

"DEAR ROBERT,

"Caught at last, and by those rascally Round-heads, whom you call patriots and saints, in a few minutes more I shall be shot—that is, if their clumsy carbines take good aim—to be sure they can fire near enough their mark not to miss. But I write to tell you what you will hear through

all the various channels by which news travels,—
Francesca Carrara is in England, residing under
the roof of Lawrence Aylmer! Ah, dear Robert,
let me commend Lucy Aylmer to your care—the
only woman I ever loved, even, save that I have
not your nobler nature, as you loved Francesca.
I duped both yourself and that young and ge-
nerous Italian, who has just risked her life for
mine. I passed myself upon her for you, and till
this moment she has never been undeceived. But
one who was attached to you must have found
that I was an unworthy likeness; she felt the
change, though she knew it not;—and mark these
words,—I was scorned and rejected, and anger
kept me from deceiving you. But death brings
awful, and some kindly thoughts. Never did your
true and strong affection rise up so vividly—so
tenderly to my thoughts. I may have lived, but I
will not die, quite undeserving of it. God bless you
and Francesca!—you deserve each other. I hear
Major Johnstone walking quicker and quicker.
How heavily he steps! Good by!

“ Yours till death,

(not very long, by the by),

“ FRANCIS EVELYN.”

The captive cavalier calmly folded the scroll, rose up, and, presenting it to Johnstone, said, "Now, sir, I am at your service. I believe my birth entitles me to precedence;" and he left the apartment first.

CHAPTER X.

“ Let me die,
At least, with an unshackled eye.”

BYRON.

THE fresh air of the open windows, as they came to the inhabited part of the house, revived Francesca, though, when the soldier, who had found his way to the kitchen, gave her to the care of the astonished Aylmer himself, she was still too dizzy and too confused to be conscious of her situation. Lawrence gave her a glass of water, and, restored in some degree, she silently accepted his aid to reach their usual room. On their entrance, Aylmer was greeted by a new surprise—his daughter Lucy, whom he very naturally supposed was quietly in her bed, lay on the window-seat, the casement open, and herself asleep; but the traces of tears were upon her cheek, and her long fair hair loose, and yet saturated with the dews of the night.

“ For God’s sake, let her sleep at any hazard !” whispered Francesca, now fully recalled to all that had passed and was passing. “ Another time for explanation. Poor, poor Lucy !” added she, as her mind reverted to the terrible awakening before her.

“ I must go,” rejoined Aylmer, “ and keep some sort of order ; for my house is turned inside out.” Then, gazing earnestly at Lucy, he said in a low tone, “ I will not—dare not, ask what this means now ; my dear, my beautiful child !”—but his voice failed, and he hurried from the chamber.

“ Any thing rather than this torturing suspense !” cried Francesca, who had been standing with her face buried in her hands. “ I can look into the yard from Lucy’s bed-room—pray God that she may not awake !”

With that dizzy yet desperate feeling which braces even to the last the over-wrought nerves, Francesca cast one more glance on the unconscious sleeper, whose bright hair and flushed cheek were golden and rosy as the morning now breaking around her ; but Lucy was too thoroughly exhausted to awaken. There she lay, her head pillowed upon her arm, like a child that had cried itself to rest ; while Francesca bent over her, pale, cold as a statue, for lip and cheek were

both white—only the blue veins were swollen on the forehead, and the large closed eyes wore a strange expression, most unlike their usual intellectual darkness. With a light yet hurried step, she went up stairs, and approached the lattice. At first she could not force herself to look out; but the agony of endurance grew insupportable, and she leant forth. Her worst fears were not realised; but there was enough to alarm her in the unusual aspect of the place. It was now about six o'clock, and that first freshness was on the air, which is to the day what youth is to life,—so light, so elastic, so sweet, and so brief; the roofs of the thatched buildings glittered with the moisture rapidly drying up; the fragrant breath of the cows, the long lingering odour from the hay-ricks, were so perceptible on the clear atmosphere; long shadows came down from the house and the trees, but they only made more visible the golden transparency of the sunshine.

“ O God !” cried Francesca, “ this contrast of the glad external world is dreadful to that within !”

The farm-yard, though morning was upon it, shewed none of its usual morning activity; the hinds stood staring and bewildered in knots of some two or three, who appeared as though they sought to draw nigh to each other for protection,

not companionship, and cast half-sullen, half-scared looks at the intruders on their own domain. The soldiers were scattered about, some talking to each other with the most careless indifference, others collected round a gaunt-looking sergeant, who was reading from a small Bible, and whose nasal accents were audible, though Francesca could not catch the words. A small body of dismounted troopers were lounging near the gate, waiting for their leader's call to boot and saddle; but there was one party that riveted her eye—six men, of grave and determined bearing, who stood apart, leaning upon their carbines. The domestic fowls alone seemed undisturbed by the unusual visitors, unless a more than ordinary noise of chirping and fluttering marked something of fear; but the large house-dog could not be quieted, and kept up that savage bark and growl which indicated its consciousness of intrusion and danger. Suddenly all eyes turned in one direction, and Major Johnstone came from the house, followed by the prisoner and four soldiers. Francis stepped lightly forward, and flung round a glance of the most careless contempt; and as he passed below the window, Francesca could hear him humming the notes of a popular loyalist song peculiarly obnoxious to the rigid fanatics. The insult

caused many a dark brow to turn scowling upon him ; but he paid them back glance for glance, and met every frown with a smile. He reached the appointed place ; and, at a sign from Major Johnstone, one of the troopers drew out a handkerchief, and attempted to bind his eyes. The prisoner flung him off with a force scarcely to be expected from one of his slight figure, and, turning quickly, said, " Let me die like a man !— whatever is my death, let me face it ! " No further effort was made to blindfold him ; but the carbineers formed their deadly rank, looking, however, towards their commander for the signal.

" I will myself give the word ! " cried Evelyn.
" When I take off my hat, fire ! "

Francesca had hitherto looked on with that sort of charmed gaze with which the fascinated bird watches the gray and glittering eye of the serpent which forces it to its doom ; but womanly terror now mastering strong excitement, she knelt down, and, hiding her face in her hands, muttered incoherent ejaculations of prayer.

Major Johnstone had, by a stern gesture of assent, marked his permission for the prisoner to give his own death signal ; and Francis, after a leisurely survey, expressive of the utmost contumely of the iron faces that darkened round him,

raised his hand to his head ;—every carbine was raised, too, in preparation ; and the sudden rise of the steel tubes flashed like some strange meteor in the sun.

“ God save King Charles ! ” exclaimed the reckless cavalier, and flung his white plumed hat in the air.

A loud burst of musketry rang far away into the distant forest ; many echoes took it up, and repeated the mimic thunder ; a strange screaming rose from the startled birds ;—but loud above them all was heard the shriek of a woman.

Lucy, rousing from her sleep, as the morning light fell upon her face, had sought her own chamber ; she had entered unperceived by Francesca, who was kneeling in that last horror of having to look on a violent death. Approaching her friend, she was startled by the report of the carbines—scarcely aware of her own act, she had looked from the lattice, and saw Major Johnstone standing in the cold triumph of gratified revenge beside the body of a cavalier, whose life-blood was welling in a crimson flood to his feet. At a glance Lucy recognised Francis Evelyn.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Even beauty’s shadow lies
Like darkness on the earth.”

J. K. HERVEY.

FOR weeks it seemed as if the fearful tragedy acted at their very threshold had left a gloom not to be dispelled on the whole party. Night and day the appalling death-note of the carbine rang in their ears ; and one event, and one individual, was the sole topic of discourse. Still Francesca could feel horror only, not grief ; and there were now hope and happiness at her heart, long strangers to its haunted circle. She had indeed been true to herself, and to her first and only love ; the image of Robert Evelyn might again be the one cherished thought, the one perpetual dream of her solitude. It was like returning to her native country—returning to that dear and early vision. Again life wore the beauty of promise—the deep and sweet well of sympathy, so long dried up, flowed again. The first time that

she passed along the fields and entered the dim glades of the forest, she felt what a new life had awakened within her. She no longer turned a cold and dispirited gaze on the objects around—she could enter into and rejoice in all natural loveliness. The magnificent autumn, the royal spendthrift of the year, was now wearing that proud regality so soon to depart into darkness and decay; and this it is, despite its purple and crimson, which laugh the glories of Tyre to scorn, that renders autumn the most melancholy of the seasons—the others have a further-looking hope. Winter softens into spring, spring blushes into summer, and summer ripens into autumn,—all going on into increased good. But autumn darkens into winter, and is the only quarter that ends as the destroyed and the desolate. There is in autumn no hope, that prophetic beautifier of the foregone year. But just now, the glorious conqueror of wood and field was in the first flush of its radiant hours; every object shone out transparent in the clear blue air of the bright brief noon. If the hedges had lost the may and the honeysuckle, the scarlet berries of the hip and the haw shone like carved coral—the rich orchard of the birds; the slender bindweed wound about with its pale and delicate flowers—so delicate, yet so deadly;

and one or two late flowers yet put forth their wan blossoms, pining as if gentle exiles of the spring, and yet very, very lovely. The noisy cheerfulness of rural occupation was over—the grass was mown, the corn reaped, the fruit gathered; and the loudest sound in the lonely fields was when, adventuring too near some late brood, the partridge sought to deceive by a plaintive cry and seeming helplessness, crossing before your very feet, till, when drawn to a sufficient distance, suddenly the air vibrated to the flutter of her active pinions. Or sometimes, passing too near a sequestered copse, the shy tenants were startled, and the superb plumage of the pheasant dashed aside the branches, and the stately bird soared up on rattling wing.

But if autumn wear the insignia of nature's royalty, its purple and gold, in only the shaded lane or the green field with its one or two old trees, what is its more than eastern pomp in a wooded empire like the New Forest! The stalwart oaks yet retained their dark green foliage, and the yews and firs stood unchanged; all others bore the signs of that evanescent splendour, very type of all our earthly glories. The leaves now wore the colours which had been worn by the flowers—richer, perhaps, but wanting the tender bloom of the spring. Here the lime was clothed with a

pale yellow, contrasted by the sycamore's glowing crimson; the elm shewed a rich brown, mixed with dusky orange; the hawthorns were covered with red berries, relieved by the long wreaths of the drooping ivy. Thickets of hazel-nuts clattered as the squirrels sprang from spray to spray in search of their winter store; and the sloe was thickly hung with its dim purple fruit. The furze was dry and reddening, and only in one or two sheltered nooks did a late blossom hang from the withering heath.

There is something peculiarly mournful in the sound of the autumn wind. It has none of the fierce mirth which belongs to that of March, calling aloud, as with the voice of a trumpet, on all earth to rejoice; neither has it the mild rainy melody of summer, when the lily has given its softness and the rose its sweetness to the gentle tones. Still less has it the dreary moan, the cry as of one in pain, which is borne on a November blast; but it has a music of its own—sad, low, and plaintive, like the last echoes of a forsaken lute—a voice of weeping, but tender and subdued, like the pleasant tears shed over some woful romance of the olden time, telling some mournful chance of the young knight falling in his first battle, or of a maiden pale and perishing with ill-requited love.

Onward passes that complaining wind through the quiet glades, like the angel of death mourning over the beauty it is commissioned to destroy. At every sweep down falls a shower of sapless leaves—ghosts of the spring—with a dry, sorrowful rustle; and every day the eye misses some bright colour of yesterday, or marks some bough left entirely bare and sear; and ever and anon, on some topmost branch, as the foliage is quite swept off, a deserted nest is visible—love, spring, and music, passed away together.

But the heart is its own world, and the outward influence takes its tone from that within. With how much lighter a step, with how much brighter an eye, did Francesca wander through the forest, even in the last desolation of autumn, than she did in all the bloom and buoyancy of spring! Not all the natural horror and pity, deeply and keenly felt at Francis's awful death, could disturb the sweet and secret satisfaction now garnered up in her inmost thoughts. All old belief in the good, the beautiful, and the true, revived within her. Doubt, that most oppressive atmosphere upon the moral existence, rolled away like a vapour from the future; once more she could hope and trust—she felt happy enough for forgiveness. It had not been human had she not

sometimes bitterly contrasted her present state with what might have been its lot but for the cruel deception of Francis; but she was strong in her newly awakened reliance—she could look forward—the future owed her some recompense for the wretchedness of the past. The first time when she gave herself up to that aerial architecture, after the events we have just recorded, was her ensuing visit to Guido's grave. The sympathy was still entire between them, and it seemed as if her happiness were incomplete till shared with him; and beside that green and quiet mound his presence was so actual! Perhaps the stillness and seclusion aided the imagination—nothing was there to disturb or destroy the illusion. She threaded the narrow paths of the forest in the pleasant company of her own thoughts—those paths through which Evelyn had so often wandered. Frequently before had this idea risen in her mind, but then it was sternly banished—now she dwelt upon it with eager delight. With what a feeling of joyful security did her heart go back to its old allegiance! Till now she had scarcely been aware of its strength, for she had known it but by its disappointment—now she fully admitted that early and passionate emotion with which Robert Evelyn had inspired her was indeed her destiny; both in the first develop-

ment of her affection, in the endeavour to make herself worthy of him, and in the mental strength acquired by the after-struggle with that very affection, when it seemed but as an unworthy weakness which needed to be subdued. His influence, and its consequences, had still been paramount—its good and its evil had formed her whole character.

A high and generous nature is always trustful. Francesca never for a moment feared Evelyn's constancy; that a knowledge of the deception practised would instantly bring him to her side, it never occurred to her to doubt; and in her full gratitude to fate, she relied upon their meeting again. She started—and the delicious reverie in which she had been indulging was broken as she approached the grave of her brother. Another and a new-made one was beside it—there reposed the mortal remains of Francis Evelyn. Pale and faint, she took her usual seat on the sod which covered Guido's lowly pillow; but her eye and her thoughts fixed on its neighbour.

There is nothing more dreary than a new-made grave—so bare, so desolate, so comfortless, with the cold stones, and damp gravel scattered all carelessly round. After a little while the long grass and the sweet wild flowers sanctify the place—even as, in the human heart, gentle me-

mories and subduing time throw a kindly soothing over the first bitter and rigid suffering. "It shall not long be left thus dreary," thought Francesca, and turned aside her face, but in vain; she could think of nothing but the murdered cavalier—for murdered he was in her eyes—whose coffin was hidden but by a little heap of recklessly flung earth. Again and again she recurred to the scene of his execution, whose horror was heightened by the familiar circumstances with which it was attended. The customary scaffold has its own awe—justice and obedience and usage surround the place; but to die a violent death, and by the hand of man, amid life's daily scenes, all associations so domestic and so ordinary, aggravates the ghastly spectacle, and makes the doom seem at once cruel and undeserved.

Francesca had never sufficiently commanded herself to pass through the farm-yard since Evelyn's death; but the sudden sight of the newly dug grave recalled every occurrence of that dreadful morning. She thought of his daring demeanour—of the fearlessness with which he met his fate—of his youth, and the promise which life held out to him. Young, high-born, handsome, rich, and brave—all these advantages were in one moment less than nothing. She fruitlessly struggled with the

recollection that his evil had been her good—that but for the serious thoughts which throng before as the heralds of death, he might never have avowed the deception which he had practised—and never, on this side the grave, would she and Robert Evelyn have known how dearly and truly each loved the other. But this idea brought with it a chill and vague terror. Was happiness, then, surrounded by loss and sacrifice?—was destiny to be propitiated but by a human victim? An unfathomable dread seemed to steal gradually over her spirits—only mournful images arose within her mind. Henriette, Guido, perishing in their good and beautiful youth!—Francis Evelyn cut off with—she dared not think how many unrepented faults! What was there in her that her fate should be better than theirs? In vain she strove to shake off her depression—she felt but the more subdued. The large tears fell like dew on the slender stalks of the wild flowers below—alas! were they omens?

CHAPTER XII.

“ Still the rose is fanned
With life and love’s sweet hues.”

CROLY.

IN the meantime how did Lucy bear the horror of Evelyn’s death?—with an abandonment to despair it was heart-rending to witness. Fortunately her health was delicate—we say fortunately, for the mind must have yielded, had not the body sunk under the pressure of this first great sorrow. In Lucy’s brief and quiet career, crime and anguish had as yet been but words; sad and gentle regrets might have flung a moment’s lightest shadow on her path, but she had known no real suffering, and its first experience was a shock which left her scarcely the power of feeling.

It is an old saying (and most old sayings are singularly true—we are not so very much wiser than our ancestors, after all), that the most violent grief is the soonest over; yes, if this violence rather

alludes to the expression than to the emotion. Words and tears exhaust themselves—and certainly Lucy indulged amply in both. She was one of those timid and dependent tempers to whom weeping is natural; in all emergencies, great or small, her resource, if not remedy, was to cry. To such a one, sympathy is the first relief—confession half transferred the responsibility of the thoughts confessed to the hearer; and the extent of her regret was unconsciously measured by what she was expected to feel. Bodily fatigue soon follows upon the burst of sobs and the passionate exclamation; rest must follow, and the repose soon becomes physical as well as mental. Despair is unnatural; and the powers of Time, the comforter, can scarcely be exaggerated; but the agency by which he works is exhaustion.

There is a grief which may darken a whole life, shut up the heart from every influence but its own, remain unchanged through every change of various fortune, flinging its own shadow over all that is fair, its own bitterness into all that is sweet; but that grief is the silent and the secret—it goes abroad with a smooth brow and a smiling lip—it knows not the relief of tears, and words it disdains. None have fathomed its depths, for its existence is denied; pride is mingled with its

strength, for the hidden soul knows there is that within which parts it from its kind, and perhaps triumphs even in such agonising consciousness. With such the spirits often seem buoyant without a cause—often too gay for the occasion. The truth is, that society is to them as a theatre; and what actor is there who does not occasionally over-act his part? Few ever penetrate their dark and weary seclusion, for few ever look beyond the surface, unless actuated by some hope, fear, or love of their own, and then their feelings blind their judgment. Such motives turn all objects into mirrors, which reflect some likeness, even if distorted, of themselves. We conjecture, question, desire, anticipate—do every thing but observe. And slight, indeed, are the tokens by which the seared heart betrays itself. But it has its signs; there is that real disregard of the pleasures in which it shares, half as a disguise, half to avoid the trouble of importunity. But the eye, however trained to attention, will wander; the set smile becomes absent—weariness is pleaded as an excuse—and lassitude serves as the cloak to indifference. Moreover, though almost unconsciously, the words have a biting and shrewd turn—the opinions are either harsh or given with undue levity—contradiction is almost

habitual—and the feelings, denied the resource of sympathy, take refuge in sarcasm.

But Lucy's was too yielding and tearful a nature for this strong endurance and hidden suffering. She was like those fragile creepers which, flung off from the protection of one branch, cling intuitively to the next. Her love for Francis Evelyn was an emanation of that romance which is in the heart of every girl; her preference was as much circumstance as choice, and strengthened by no comparison. It was the natural consequence of solitude, and the belief in the necessity of having a lover, which flutters round the very youthful fancy; and Francis was the only young and handsome cavalier who happened to have been thrown in her way. And perhaps the attachment owed half its power to its concealment and to its silence. Had she married him, she would have been very miserable—her beauty would inevitably have lost, in his eyes, its charm with its novelty; and then all her real deficiencies would have been suddenly discovered, besides many which would only have existed in his own fancy. Nothing could have given her the tact, the presence of mind, the quick perception, the self-control necessary to success in society; and her sweetness and gentleness would

have been like a faint fragrance—too delicate for the overpowering atmosphere on which it was fated to waste its fragile existence. With his active and intriguing temper, Francis would doubtless have taken an eager part in the court cabals and conspiracies which make the history of Charles the Second; and how useless in such would he have found Lucy! Neglect would have been her inevitable portion, and to her that would have been worse than death—perhaps death itself.

There is a flower which our earth is too rude to nourish, and whose sole existence is in the clear pure atmosphere; such a flower is Lucy's best emblem. The harsher duties and cares of this weary world were not for her—her natural element was affection. For days and nights Francesca watched beside her pillow, and patiently soothed the sorrowful invalid. Both had much to say—for the nurse had her own course of discipline to pursue with her patient. From the beginning she recounted her own history; and the effect was what she anticipated—indignation became Lucy's strongest sensation; she could not comprehend such duplicity, and she even exaggerated its cruelty and its wrong. There was also a little feminine vanity—a quick sense of injury—

which was wonderfully beneficial. Francesca just suggested the idea, which was eagerly caught and tenaciously retained—namely, Francis's infidelity to herself. What! could he go away, leaving her to a solitude wholly occupied with his image, and yet have his heart sufficiently vacant to admit even light and passing fancies, beside the serious vow and faith offered to another! Lucy angrily disclaimed aught beyond pity for the memory of the treacherous cavalier; but said that, for his sake, she should hate the very name of love. Francesca thought this rather a rash assertion, as, indeed, such disclaimers usually are.

Winter was now setting in, and our Italian, with all the early associations of a southern clime, trembled before its gloomy influence, and feared lest she should see Lucy's spirits sink with the monotony of its long evenings; for she saw at once that she had not mind enough to be attracted by any abstract pursuit—the selfishness was so quiet and so kindly as to be almost imperceptible; still she could only be interested in something referring to herself. She had no energy for application—in music she never got beyond a few simple airs caught by ear; and Italian, which she began to learn, soon became equally wearisome to both

mistress and pupil—for it is a wearisome task to teach where there is little inclination and less understanding.

But an unexpected auxiliary appeared on the scene. We have before alluded to Charles Aubyn, the young clergyman of their village. One visit led to another, and soon every evening saw him a privileged visitor in their apartment, to Lucy's increasing pleasure, and Francesca's great relief.

The reason why so many fallacious opinions have passed into proverbs is owing to that carelessness which makes the individual instance the general rule. Of all feelings, love is the most modified by character; like the chameleon, it is indeed coloured by the air which it breathes. To half the world its depth is unknown, and its intensity unfelt. To such the expression of its wild passion, its fateful influence, its unalterable faith, are but mysteries, or even mockeries; while, again, to those who hold such true and fervent creed, the heartless change, the utter forgetfulness, the sudden transfer of life's deepest and dearest emotion, is equally absurd and incomprehensible.

Francesca could not at first believe her eyes when she saw the tremulous rose mount into Lucy's cheek at the sound of Charles Aubyn's approach. Scarcely could she credit that the absence and

restlessness which her companion betrayed when his daily visit was deferred could be felt on the comparative stranger's account. But when she saw them sit mutually contented by each other's side for hours, Lucy's soft blue eyes only raised to give one gentle smile, and then sink half agitation, half timidity—and when, finally, by some process or other, Lucy usually contrived that, let their discourse begin on what subject it might, it regularly ended with some reference to Mr. Aubyn—she was obliged to yield to conviction, and to allow, what no romantic imagination likes to admit, that there may be, nay, actually is, such a thing as second love in the world; and with a pardonable, because natural, inconsistency, she felt almost disappointed that Lucy had followed her own advice, and forgotten one so unworthy of her affection as Francis Evelyn. It took some time to abate the poetry of her disappointment, and to force from her the admission that Lucy was much more likely to be happy with her present lover—for such he was now acknowledged to be.

Charles Aubyn was one of those in whose composition the heart has a larger share than the head. With more talent, his native enthusiasm would have been a powerful influence; but it lacked

that ability which, by strengthening the impulse, gives it power over others. He felt keenly, but he neither reflected nor calculated—hence he lived in a little world of exaggeration. With Lucy this impetuosity served his cause—it carried her along with it; but when enthusiasm of any kind is unshared, it appears only on its ridiculous side; and hence Francesca's good sense and good taste were perpetually revolted by a thousand slight incoherences and absurdities utterly imperceptible to her companion. Fortunately for Charles Aubyn, he was placed in a situation for which he was eminently calculated; his kind-heartedness was constantly called into action by his duties among his parishioners, and his excitable temperament found vent in religious fervour; and in Lucy he met with that up-looking admiration which, under any circumstances, it is exceedingly comfortable to inspire.

Lawrence Aylmer was one of the best-satisfied of the party. He much desired to see his daughter married—he felt that she was quite unfitted for those in her own sphere—had been frightened into almost poetry when he learnt her attachment to Evelyn,—so many were the evil consequences which he anticipated might have happened from so dangerous a connexion; but

now he was more than contented—he was delighted—and went to sleep every evening reckoning up the various kinds of worldly substance which he had amassed for her sake.

CHAPTER XIII.

“The tears of youth dry as quickly as the dews in summer ; and the young heart rebounds from grief as quickly as the arrow from the bow.”

The Buccaneer.

TIME passed as time ever does when passed monotonously, that is, with a degree of rapidity which only astonishes us when it is recalled to mind by some chance circumstance. Time should be reckoned by events, not hours ; the heart is its truest time-piece, at least as concerns ourselves. Spring came, and found Francesca's situation unchanged. Lord Avonleigh had been still retained a prisoner in the Tower ; Robert Evelyn was still in Ireland ; and hope, somewhat wearied by feeding but “on its own sweet life,” had taken a deeper tone of anxiety. Lucy's marriage was only waiting till the repairs were finished at the vicarage ; and preparations occupied all her thoughts, and most of her time. But a great change was at hand. It would seem as if calm were necessary

to convulsion; for the tranquillity of the last few months was again to be disturbed by political commotion.

It matters little to the progress of this narrative to trace how the reins of government fell, rather than were taken, from the hands of the incompetent Richard; and how the dull caution and straight-forward devotion to expediency of George Monck replaced the Stuarts on the throne: thus giving a nation the fairest opportunity that was ever thrown away of adjusting ancient privileges and existing rights, of limiting power, yet preserving authority, and of realising those many theories of liberty and justice which to this day remain theories. But England at the period of the Restoration was, like a child escaped from school, weary of restraint, impatient for amusement, and little inclined to balance the future against the present. The whole island became one festival, to welcome the return of the man whom they had banished, and whose father they had executed. Heaven knows, consistency ought to be valued, were it only for its rarity.

Lord Avonleigh was at once liberated from his imprisonment, well prepared to be considered, and to consider himself, a martyr to the cause of loyalty; and as the services of the rich nobleman, who

wants nothing, are more easily requited than those of the real and poor sufferer, the attached and needy exile, his claims to notice and favour were most graciously acknowledged. Accordingly, he returned to his seat in a little fever of royal devotedness—it was the fashionable epidemic; and who coming from Whitehall could be without it?

Bells ringing, flags waving, may-poles—so long unseen—bonfires in due preparation for night, morris-dancers, who had practised for the last four-and-twenty hours unremittingly to refresh their ancient craft, an ox roasted whole, cakes, ale, crowds, and confusion,—all assembled in and about Avonleigh Park, to greet the master's return. A procession was arranged, and perhaps Francesca was the only individual in the whole country that did not go forth to join either actors or spectators. Lucy, full of girlish delight, eagerly pressed her to accompany her and Charles Aubyn to the park; but she refused. She felt that her place was not among her father's dependants; some chance might bring them in contact, and to her it would only be with a sense of degradation. Perhaps, too, an aversion to what had fallen under her own observation of the kind of amusement likely to be found, or contempt, which called itself distaste, strengthened her reso-

lution not a little. Still, when the care of watching Lucy's toilette, advising and altering, was completed—no sinecure office, for Lucy, hitherto confined to the most quiet and staid costume, was rather inclined to run into the extreme of bright colours—when she had watched her walk down the field with Charles Aubyn, looking as pretty and as pleased as possible, and returned into their deserted chamber, its silence and solitude struck her forcibly. The gay peal of the bells came upon the air, mingled with music, which owed much of its melody to being afar off. She could observe flags waving in the distance, and now and then a gaily dressed group crossing one of the heights; but these were soon past. And as the view of their house was chiefly bounded by the forest, there was soon nothing to be seen—nothing, save the ringing bells, recalled the festivity to her mind.

Francesca was alone, quite alone in the house, and the consciousness of this was inexpressibly dreary; not perhaps but that on any other day she would have sat, read, and thought by herself quite as much as she had done to-day; still, the knowledge that there was no one near—that all others but herself were employed in one peculiar and cheerful pursuit, could not but force her into a vein of ungracious comparison. The extreme

stillness of every thing around jarred upon her nerves, instead of soothing them. She would have given the world for some one to speak to; she opened a book, but she could not keep her attention to the page; she touched her lute, but its music was distasteful; she went into the garden, but it wearied her to pace up and down the well-known walks,—“ I know every plant by heart,” thought she, and returned listlessly to the house. Then the ringing of the bells in the distance became so irritating—they kept perpetually distracting her mind. At length the peals ceased—dinner attracted even the ringers—and the stillness was now unbroken. But the one painful idea which had taken possession of Francesca’s imagination haunted her.

“ Alas!” murmured the lonely girl, “ others have kindred and friends, with whom gaiety becomes indeed pleasure, for it is shared. Many a happy circle will gather together to-day, exchange hopes, and lay up recollections for months to come. But I, how neglected—how isolated do I feel! not one living being at this moment of mutual gratulations even thinks of my existence; no one knows or cares that I am sitting in melancholy seclusion, while all but myself are glad around.

What have I done to be so shut out from human affection and sympathy?"

Almost for the first time since his brother's disclosure, she found no comfort in thinking of Evelyn. Never had the chances of their re-union seemed so precarious; never before had she felt so hopeless. Unfortunate as she had hitherto been, how could she believe that destiny would yet relent? She unlocked the casket which contained her mother's picture, and gazed even more earnestly than usual on that beautiful face; its frank, glad smile was too painful; it seemed an omen of all that could make a joyous and beloved existence; and yet how had her's terminated! The memory of what others have suffered makes us tremble for ourselves. Her peculiar course had never seemed so difficult as it did now, on the very verge of its termination. What would be her father's reception? Perhaps, all old love forgotten, he would look upon her but as an intruder from an unwelcome past, recalling all he wished to forget—all that he had forgotten. Could she bear to wring from him a cold acknowledgment, dictated but by justice! And yet affection, could it spring up at a moment's warning! How could he love a stranger who for attraction brought before him the remem-

brance of all the faults and the follies of his youth!

Francesca rose and paced the room in an agony of doubt. The more she thought of her situation, the more she saw the necessity of advancing her claims. Lucy would soon be married, and then Lawrence Aylmer's could be no home for her; and her cheek burnt with sudden fire at the thought, that in a little while the slender remains of the money they had brought from Italy would be exhausted. She knew how helpless then would be her condition—young, a female, a stranger, without acquaintance or introduction, what could she do? The idea that she would not seek her father, which had sprung up in the despondency of the moment, faded away. However painful, the task must be accomplished.

She was awakened from her gloomy reverie by the beating of a sudden shower against the lattice; some books lay on the window-seat, and she went to shut the open casement. She stood looking out, involuntarily attracted by the beauty of the scene. The sunshine glittered through the diamond shower, which came like a flight of radiant arrows; while, outlined on a dim purple cloud, a magnificent rainbow spanned the mighty forest; instantly a second, but fainter, spread beneath the

first; but even while she looked, the vast cloud dispersed, broken fragments of delicious hues coloured the atmosphere, a soft violet faded into pale primrose, and touches of rose deepened into red. Gradually the sky cleared into one deep blue, over which a mass of white clouds, broken into a thousand fantastic shapes, went sailing slowly by.

The freshness of the fragrant hour was irresistible, and Francesca again sought the garden; but now the influence of the lovely day was upon her, and her step unconsciously grew lighter. Grass, leaf, and flower caught new life from the genial rain; a thousand odours unperceived before were abroad; a thousand colours bright with the noon now shone out upon the green or painted foliage; every breath was aromatic, and not a spray but mirrored a sunbeam in the hanging rain-drop. Francesca gazed around, and hope and reliance arose within her. She looked up touchingly and gratefully to heaven, while her late discontent seemed almost as a sin in her own eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ It speaks of former scenes—of days gone by—
 Of early friendships—of the loved and lost ;
 And wakes such music in the heart, as sigh
 Of evening woos from harp-strings gently crost.”

MALCOLM.

It was late in the evening before Lucy came home, in the gayest possible spirits ; she had been equally amused and admired, and now returned in a little flutter of pleasure and vanity. She had a great deal to say, but very little to tell ; and repeated over and over again, that Lord Avonleigh had spoken something so kind about her to her father, though she could not remember the exact words ; and that Lord Stukeley had danced with her ; moreover, that it was very hot in the middle of the day ; and that when they went into the hall to supper, there was a peacock, from whose mouth ascended a little flame ; but beyond these important facts, no information could be elicited from her.

It is curious to note how few people ever con-

trive to give you any idea of what they have seen ; they seize upon some little personal fact, and there the memory halts. While others, who allow their observation to travel out of their own sphere, contrive to bring the scene vividly before you, and without the aid of invention, but with a dramatic power many a writer might envy, give the most lively and graphic description, simply because they have attended to what passed around them.

Francesca had a hundred questions to ask about Lord Avonleigh, but her curiosity remained ungratified for two reasons ; first, because she could learn little from Lucy, excepting the reiterated “ so handsome, and so polite ;” and secondly, because she was aware of her own interest in the subject, which she was yet unwilling to avow — and what occupies ourselves we always fancy must be obvious to others. Nothing ever teaches us the extent of our mutual and universal indifference.

Late as it was when they separated, Francesca did not retire to rest, but, re-trimming the lamp, she drew the little table towards her, and prepared to write to Lord Avonleigh. More than once she had begun to address him before, but her resolution had always failed, and she had deferred the execution till to-morrow, which, as usual, never

came. Now, whatever she intended to do, it became imperative upon her to do at once. She was unwilling that her father should hear of her, and not from herself; besides, and her heart warmed at the thought, he might feel hurt at the appearance of neglect. How often did she commence writing; but how impossible she found it to say what seemed sufficient to herself! Wearied out by her own indecision, she at length sealed the following letter, most thoroughly dissatisfied with it, but feeling hopeless of another attempt.

“ In entreating your Lordship’s attention to the enclosed packet, I have nothing to rely upon but your kindness, and the hope that some sad, perhaps tender, remembrances from the past may plead the cause of the present. It explains itself, and, till read, I trust you will pardon the intrusion of a seeming stranger.

“ F. DE C.”

The packet contained Arden’s confession, Avonleigh’s own letters, and her mother’s miniature. What a world of passion and of suffering were within its slender folds! But the passion was now cold as the dust in which it had long slept, and the suffering was now but a memory. Her

letter finished, Francesca retired to rest, but in vain. What the morrow might bring forth kept her awake with feverish anticipation.

There is something in human nature that shrinks from any great change, even though that change be for the better. Alas! all experience shews us how little we dare trust our fate. At length, worn and wearied, she slept; but the turmoil of her thoughts was also in her dreams. Now, pale as she last beheld him, she saw Guido, beckoning her with a sad and mournful aspect. Suddenly he changed into Evelyn; but he, too, seemed grave and cold; and yet she followed him through a dim uncertain country, weighed down by that sense of oppression and helplessness which is only known to sleep. His silence appeared so strange, and fear was upon her; she tried, but could not speak — at last he passed away — terrible shapes crowded round her; and, in the effort to avoid their loathsome contact, she awoke.

The sun was shining into her room, and the birds singing cheerfully, while the many odours from the garden below came in at the open lattice. All was reviving and joyous; and the depression of the previous night vanished like the fear in her visions. Her first act was to despatch her letter to Lord Avonleigh; that done, she could settle to

nothing, but wandered from the house to the garden, and from the garden to the house, in all the restlessness of anticipation. Suddenly, she thought Lord Avonleigh would, as soon as the packet was read, perhaps come to see her. A natural emotion of feminine vanity made her desire to look as well as she could; and, to her foreign and classical taste, the close cap and grey boddice which she had lately been wearing were odious—besides, she wished, if possible, to recall by her appearance all his early associations with Italy.

For the first time for many weeks her beautiful black hair was released from the confinement of the plaited muslin border, and bound up in its own rich braids round the small and graceful head. For a moment she turned a hesitating glance towards the gay attire that had only been opened to shew Lucy since she left Paris; but, to say nothing of the inconsistency of such courtly garb in her present abode, their fashion would recall nothing to her father's mind, while a more national costume would carry him at once back to Parma. She therefore assumed the novice's garb, so universally worn by young Italians—a robe of black silk, only fastened round the waist by a girdle. And scarcely could she have selected aught more

becoming ; for her exquisite shape required no aid beyond the relief of the flowing drapery. Lucy, who had only seen her in either the large loose wrapping dress of serge, or in the quaint simplicity of the Puritanic garb, then so general in England, could not restrain an exclamation of admiration as she returned to their chamber.

Where there is no envy in the case—and envy rarely exists where there is no rivalry—I believe there is nothing more genuine or delightful than one woman's admiration of another's beauty. There is a pure and delicate taste about their nature which gives a keen sense of enjoyment to such appreciation ; and loveliness is to them a religion of the heart, associated with a thousand fine and tender emotions. It would have been difficult to find two more perfect, yet more opposed specimens of beauty, than the two now before us. Lucy's was the result of the sweetest colouring. The golden hair, the violet-blue of the eyes, the pearly white skin, tinted by the softest rose that ever opened on an April morning, were blending together both the lights and shadows of a spring atmosphere—soft and timid—a creature made for gentle words and watchful looks.

But Francesca's beauty belonged to features and to expression—features perfect in the Greek

outline. A brow noble as if never unworthy or ungenerous thought had crossed its white expanse; the red lip somewhat scornful, but smiling, when it did smile, with the sweetness of a thousand common smiles. Large lustrous eyes, passionate, thoughtful, clear, and calm—their general character was repose; but the lightning slept in their midnight depths—that flash which the mind alone can give, but whose light is that of the sky whence it emanates. Usually of a clear, delicate, yet healthy paleness, any strong emotion would flood her cheek with crimson—a rich, regal dye, as the heart poured forth its wealth in one glowing and prodigal tide; and that surest test of beauty—some might say that it was not to their taste, which contradiction, whim, or some other association had turned in favour of a different style; but none could deny its existence—no one would have thought of calling her merely pretty.

Long indeed did that morning appear to Francesca—the longer as her anxiety was unexpressed; for it certainly does shorten a period of waiting not a little to spend it in talking over its various probabilities of termination, wondering what will happen, while we are consoled by the strong sympathy we excite in the listener. But Francesca had never mentioned her peculiar situation with regard to

Lord Avonleigh. Naturally proud and sensitive, she was necessarily reserved; and, perhaps from never having had to practise it, she had the highest idea of the duty owed by child to parent, and held herself bound to silence on a matter which implicated and depended upon her father. Whatever she might hope and expect herself, she could allow no other to hazard a conjecture on the subject. To her own thoughts, therefore, she confined the hopes and fears whose agitation she might repress but not subdue.

CHAPTER XV.

“ He scanned, with a rapid but scrutinising glance, each of the papers contained in the parcel.”

The Buccaneer.

IT was a large, long room, whose height, though disproportioned to its other dimensions, had this advantage, that the painted ceiling was completely seen. That ceiling was covered with square compartments, each filled with strange figures, flowers, fruit, heraldic devices—all blazoned in the richest colours, so minute, so fantastic, and so highly finished, that the painting might well have exhausted a whole imagination, while its execution was the business of a complete and busy life. It was supported by a gilded cornice, carved into a thousand curious shapes and emblems, among which the horned wolf, the crest of the Avonleigh family, was conspicuous. Beneath was a black oaken wainscot, each of whose panels was set in gilded frames, to match the cornice. Little, however, of the wall was seen, for it was nearly

hidden by the arched book-cases; and the ponderous tomes, mostly bound in black or white vellum, long since grown dingy with age, contrasted forcibly with the gayer ornaments of their habitation.

The chimney-piece was of party-coloured marble, covered with figures, some of whose faces were beautiful, but generally running off into those grotesque combinations which characterised the peculiar taste of their time. Fire there was none; but a large china jar was filled with green boughs and flowers, and occupied nearly the whole hearth. Opposite was a range of some half-dozen narrow high windows, through which the sun-beams came slanting, and seemed striving to make acquaintance with heavy arm-chairs, covered with elaborate embroidery—with the dusky shelves, whence glittered occasionally the silver clasps of some old volume—and with an antique cabinet, whose open doors shewed a collection of toys, cumbrous and odd-looking, but a convincing proof that the taste for nicknacks is no modern invention.

Towards one of the windows a table was drawn, and there, loitering over the remains of an ample breakfast, were seated Lord Avonleigh and his son,—sometimes talking eagerly, and looking

with a pleased and prolonged gaze on the many familiar objects around.

“ This is better than the Tower,” exclaimed Lord Avonleigh, as his eye followed the green sweep of the park to where it merged in the forest.

“ But will you never have finished ?” exclaimed Lord Stukeley. “ I am impatient to run over the old place. Half an hour ago, I agreed with you, that *avant tout il faut déjeuner*”—(a few days at Whitehall had already imbued the youth with the prevailing fashion of using French when English would have done as well, if not better)—“ but really we are spending half the day in looking out of the window.”

What answer his father might have made it is impossible to say ; for at that instant a servant entered, and gave in Francesca’s packet.

“ A lady’s writing ! and very pretty writing it is, *vraiment, mon père*. I do not know whether I can allow this.”

“ Well, you can save me the trouble of opening it : I doubt much my taking any interest in the matter.”

Albert opened the packet, and proceeded to read Francesca’s note aloud.

“ Very mysterious ! Why, my dear father, this is quite a delightful adventure.”

“ Let me look at the note,” said Lord Avonleigh ; “ I am sure I do not know the hand.”

While he was considering the scroll, his son unfastened the miniature. “ A picture, too !” exclaimed he ; “ I wonder whether it be that of our unknown correspondent ? She could not have sent a better letter of introduction. Did you ever see so lovely a face ?” and he gave the portrait to his father.

Had a spectre risen from the yawning earth at his feet, Lord Avonleigh could not have received a greater shock. He leapt from his seat, and stood gazing, as if spell-bound, on that long-forgotten face. Years flitted by, and Padua’s walks and walls seemed to circle him round. The little garden and its moonlight meetings, with the fair girl, the spirit of the place,—all arose as the things of yesterday. A shudder passed over him. What suffering might he not now have to learn ! He dreaded to seek the contents of these letters.

He was roused by Albert’s cutting the string round the next enclosure. “ I believe,” said he, in a broken voice, “ I must look over these letters myself : they relate to a long-past period of my life, and, perhaps, are ill-suited to meet any eye but mine.”

Albert started as he marked the sudden

change in Lord Avonleigh's countenance. "My dearest father," exclaimed he, as he gave him the letters, "do not exclude me from your confidence; my love for you will supply the place of experience."

"Not now," replied his father; "as yet I know not what I have to learn;—leave me for the present."

"I may soon return?" asked the youth, as he paused on the window-sill.

"Certainly, my child."

And, satisfied with the affectionate look which answered his own, Albert sprang down into the park.

Lord Avonleigh drew the papers towards him, and, turning his back to the light, prepared to examine their contents; but it was long before he could detach his gaze from the picture. The fair young face seemed to brighten beneath his look, even as it was wont to do of old: could it be so many, many years since they had parted? Deeply at that moment did Lord Avonleigh feel the conviction, that never had he been loved as he was loved by that forsaken Italian. His marriage, if not unhappy, had been indifferent; it brought back none of those passionate and tender thoughts associated with the image of Beatrice—it was not the

one charmed dream of his glad and eager youthhood.

From the contemplation of the portrait he turned to his own letters: he began to look them over, and mournful—for all things departed are mournful—was the train of feeling with which they were connected. Saddened, softened, and subdued as he felt while reading them, yet more than once he laughed aloud—so absurd did the exaggerated expressions of the boy appear to the man. At last, in pure shame, he laid them down. “Good Heaven!” exclaimed he, “could I ever have written such nonsense?—and yet how delicious was the folly! Ah! wisdom is little worth what it costs!” and, with a graver brow, he turned to Richard Arden’s letter. He read on, every feature convulsed with emotion, till he came to her death, when the paper dropped from his hand—he had never dreamed of such horror. To one who had known but the lulled emotions of domestic life, which had passed in the sunshine of prosperity—a quiet, pleasant, indolent sort of ready-shaped existence—such things appeared impossible till they had actually happened. His only relief was to execrate Arden; and, with the self-indulgence natural to one whom no bitter experience had ever forced upon still more bitter

reflection, he excused himself by blaming him. At length he read to the close. His own—Beatrice's child in England!—to her, at least, he would make ample reparation; and without waiting to think over the subject, he hastily locked the papers in a drawer of the cabinet, and hurried to Lawrence Aylmer's.

Even exaggerating, if that be possible, the difficulties of a young female left, without relation or friend, to her own resources, he was impatient to extend his protection to the hitherto orphan. It was fortunate for him that reparation took such an easy form. It cannot be denied that there are some persons whose faults are more severely punished than other persons' crimes: how much heavier had been Beatrice's portion! But Lord Avonleigh, after the first shock, put the worst part of the business aside, letting pity for the luckless Italian assume its most soothing form. He dwelt principally on Arden's shameful conduct, and his own intended kindness to Francesca; and by the time he arrived at the farm-house, he had also arrived at the conclusion that he had been only a singularly ill-used person, and was sufficiently recovered to wonder if his daughter was presentable and handsome. "If she is but pretty, we shall manage. Albert can very well spare a sister's

dower ; and, no doubt, she will marry brilliantly." Thus, occupied with pleasant prospects for the future, instead of gloomy reminiscences of the past, Lord Avonleigh entered the house.

Francesca was alone, and at once her ear detected a strange step in the passage. Her heart died within her ; in vain she endeavoured to control her emotion ;—the objects grew indistinct around her ; and when Lord Avonleigh approached and took her hand, she sank kneeling at his feet, and burst into tears.

People who have not strong feelings themselves dislike their display in others. Wanting in that sympathy which intuitively teaches how to console, agitation always embarrasses them ; they are puzzled, and know not what to say, and feel that they are in an awkward and disagreeable position.

Lord Avonleigh raised the agitated girl, and, leading her to a seat, took his place beside her.

" Do not weep, my sweet child !" said he : " surely our meeting is not a misfortune ?"

At the word " child," Francesca raised her eyes to his face, and smiled through her tears—so delightful to her unaccustomed ear were the expressions of affection. " My dearest father !" exclaimed she ; and at that moment what a

security of future happiness seemed around her! A parent's love and a parent's care were indeed a guarantee against misfortune. - Was not her fate now in his hands?

Lord Avonleigh soon recovered his self-possession. He had those elegant and finished manners which are prepared for any thing except emotion. He led Francesca to talk of herself and of her past life; and was equally satisfied with her conversation and her appearance. The classic and poetic seclusion in which the commencement of her life had passed, was, in the gracè and the refinement which it nurtured, well fitted to receive the polish of the French court; and her great beauty flung its own charm over the slightest action. Lord Avonleigh was delighted with his daughter, and she was both delighted and astonished. Was it possible that this dreaded interview could pass over so placidly? It was, however, not ended yet.

"I deeply feel," said Francesca, "your kindness in asking no questions, and demanding no proofs, beyond Mr. Arden's narrative."

"Do not speak of him," interrupted Lord Avonleigh, who, in truth, wished to avoid all mention of the disagreeable past.

"I believe," continued she, "there are still

some papers which, for our mutual satisfaction, it is fitting you should examine." So saying, she unlocked the little casket. "This," said she, in a faltering voice, "is the certificate of my—your marriage,"—she could not pronounce her mother's name to him;—"this the register of my own baptism; and this the record of her death and interment in the burying-ground of Santa Caterina."

Lord Avonleigh glanced over them; but as he read the last his whole countenance changed. "Great God!" he exclaimed: "her death occurred in August, and I was married in England seven months before! Francesca, if I acknowledge you, Albert is—" But his voice failed, and he leant back in speechless consternation.

For the first time in his life, an insuperable obstacle arose before his intention. He could not but feel most forcibly the justice of Francesca's claims: he could not hope that she would relinquish them; and yet, Albert to be disgraced, disinherited! and through whose fault?—his father's! He sprang up and approached the door, gasping for air. Francesca, who had not comprehended his meaning, thought him ill, and approached him with gentle words of inquiry.

"Not yet," said he; and drawing her hand

within his, he walked into the garden, and followed the first path into which they turned. It led to a gentle ascent that commanded the road ; and there, as if sent to startle and reproach him, Lord Stukeley met his sight. He grasped Francesca's arm, who was terrified by his sudden agitation, and whispered, " Look there !"

She looked, and saw one of the most graceful cavaliers that ever reined in a mettled horse. The white plumes of his cap danced gaily in the air, while the long curls hung over his shoulders. The likeness between him and his father was striking. The same fair broad brow, the same clear hazel eyes, the same frank smile ; and as he bent forward to caress the greyhound leaping up at his side, Francesca thought that she had never seen a handsomer youth.

" That is your brother," said Lord Avonleigh.

She gazed upon him with an eager glance of pleasure and affection. " I shall like him so much ! Will you not speak to him ?"

" Speak to him !" interrupted Lord Avonleigh ; " speak to him ! and for what ?—to tell him that he is a beggar—disgraced—that he has no right to the very name he bears ! Speak to him !—you are impatient to assume your honours as heiress of Avonleigh !"

Francesca was hurt by the manner, even more than astonished by the words. "What mean you?" exclaimed she. "You look at me reproachfully: you withdraw your hand from mine! What have I done? You were so kind. What has so suddenly changed you?"

"Francesca," resumed her father, "put yourself in yonder boy's place, and then fancy what his feelings will be, when he finds that the rank, name, and wealth in which he has been brought up are not his! Do you think it is in human nature to welcome the sister who comes to deprive him of them?"

"Deprive him of them!" repeated Francesca: "why should I deprive him of them? Give me a home, with your mutual affection; and if you could look into my heart, you would see how little I care for your wealth?"

"Are you not aware that my first marriage makes my second invalid? If you are my lawful child, Albert is not; I cannot acknowledge the one without disgracing the other."

"Let us go back to the house," said Francesca, faintly.

Silently they returned by the narrow green path, Lord Avonleigh thinking himself the most unfortunate man in the world, and his daughter

nerving herself to fulfil the resolution which she had instantly taken. The walk was short ; yet what a world of emotion passed in its brief limit ! Lord Avonleigh was bewildered and undecided ; he was like a man who, having received some great shock, stands dizzy and pained, but quite unprepared to meet its consequences. Not so with Francesca. She knew that every vision in which she had indulged was annihilated at a blow ; she saw at a glance the disadvantages of her future position. But only from one image did she turn away : she could not bear the thought of Evelyn. Still her mind was determined. No name, no rank, no wealth, no dream of love fulfilled, could reconcile her to purchase them at the expense of another. “ I,” thought she, “ am used to adversity—I know how to bear and suffer ; and sometimes I think that my spirits are too much broken to enjoy happiness, even if it came. But my brother—let me call him by that name, and fill my mind with the claims of so near and dear a tie—he is in the first flush of youth and hope, and knows not how the one will darken and the other deceive. Can I bear to write shame on that fair young brow—send him forth a wanderer from the home of which he has been the delight—sow dissension between a father and son, who now idolise each other ?

Never, never! Evelyn, dearest Evelyn! I could not purchase even our reunion on such terms: I were unworthy of you if I could. There is but one course for me to take; and, harsh and bitter though it be, that course is mine."

They had now arrived at the door. "I pray you enter," said Francesca to her companion, who paused irresolute on the threshold. She approached the table whereon stood her mother's casket. She replaced the papers within, and, turning the lock, she gave the key into Lord Avonleigh's hand, at the same time pushing the casket towards him. "You will never," whispered she, "be further troubled with claim of Francesca! No avowal could avail my mother. In her case, silence is the only justice needed by the dead. Let the noble youth, now the acknowledged heir of your house and heart, so remain."

"Albert," interrupted Lord Avonleigh, "will never allow it. You know not the pride of that young heart."

"He must never hear it," was the reply. "Let the past be what it now is—a secret between ourselves."

"But you, my noble, my generous girl!" exclaimed Lord Avonleigh, "I dare not let you pay the penalty of my former folly."

“Nay,” said she, soothingly, “I shall still rely on somewhat of protection and of kindness from you.”

“And that, indeed, you shall have. I have power and wealth,—both shall be at your command. I will do every thing I can to promote your future happiness. You will, of course, fix your abode at Avonleigh.”

“In that,” replied Francesca, “I shall be ruled by you. Here, certainly, I cannot remain; for Lucy Aylmer’s marriage takes place in a week.”

“You shall see me again this evening,” answered Lord Avonleigh. “By that time, preparations shall have been made for your reception and welcome to the house of a father, whom you must learn to forgive ere you learn to love.”

He kissed her brow, and left her. She watched him ‘unconsciously, till the winding walk hid him from her sight, and then sank back on her seat, every nerve relaxing from its high-strained excitement into utter and still despondency.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ Fear is true love’s cruel nurse.”

COLERIDGE.

LORD AVONLEIGH pursued his way home uncomfortably enough ; but still greatly relieved by Francesca’s prompt renouncement of her claims. Rapidly the injustice of permitting such a sacrifice became merged in its expediency. He laid a thousand flattering unctions to his soul, in the way of future plans for her welfare ; which all ended in that usual remedy of the weak and worldly—money. He could portion her handsomely, and marry her well ; and by the time Lord Avonleigh arrived at his own house, he felt as if he were not only a just, but a very generous individual.

No self-complacency can equal that of the selfish. Not content with its indulgence, they actually idolise it into being praiseworthy. Lord Avonleigh

was glad to escape from trouble and vexation, both of which must inevitably have fallen to his share if Francesca had insisted on her right; and he did feel grateful to her for what she saved him. But he was quite incapable of appreciating the delicacy, the generosity, the high-mindedness, which prompted her conduct; still less could he enter into the bitter and painful sense of degradation which sank into her very soul. From her childhood, the pride of ancestry, in its noblest and most imaginative feeling, had been cultivated by her grandfather's narratives of the heroic deeds and knightly bearing of the noble house of Carrara. The pride which most bestow on the present, he lavished on the past; or, rather, all he could spare from science he gave to history; and his two children were deeply imbued with a sense of what they owed to their illustrious race. Their name was as a bond against meanness or disgrace. The pure and high blood which flowed in their veins was its own and best security.

No one could have felt more keenly than Francesca what she resigned. For the last few weeks, hope, so long dormant—for even hope yields to the impossible—hope had delighted to dwell on a future, from which it had so long turned away. She had imagined herself acknowledged and be-

loved—seeing Evelyn again with every advantage, —and who that ever loved but pined to bestow every worldly good on the loved one? She had invented all possible circumstances but those under which they were now likely to meet.

The day was cold and clear, yet the atmosphere of the chamber where she sat oppressed her breathing. She drew her cloak round her, and went forth; but the air did not revive her, the sunshine could not cheer her. The reaction of the over-excited spirits aided the moral depression, and she sought the churchyard. With the living she had no ties of sympathy—she had with the dead.

The grass was now long and green upon Guido's grave, and filled with small, pale wild flowers. A heavy cloud rested over the inclosed space, where the black yews waved dismally; while, far away, the sunshine reposed on the distant heights. Francesca gazed upon it,—it was the very emblem of her fate. So did the light of youth and hope recede from her horizon, leaving around her but the weight and the shadow.

She took her usual seat beside the grave, and, leaning her head upon her arm, gave way to bitter weeping. The gloomy belief of Richard Arden rose present upon her mind; the melancholy forebod-

ing of her brother, the mournful realities of her own experience,—all pressed heavily upon her.

“ I feel it written deep within my heart,” exclaimed she, “ that we are a doomed race—that to us the common success and enjoyments of life are denied! My mother perished fearfully, desperate with her wasted youth and broken heart. Guido! how soon he took refuge in a tomb, made welcome by disappointed aspirations and outraged affection! And I—how little happiness have I ever known! how friendless, how desolate, has been my existence—how thrown back upon myself! At a time when most of my age and sex are surrounded by care,—idols of the dearest and the fondest home they can ever know, I was left to myself—my sorrows unshared, my joys unthought of, my difficulties unsoothed. How soon has any little gleam of sunshine flung upon my path been overcast! Love, which to so many turns the common earth to paradise—true, deep, ay, and requited as mine has been, yet to what mortification and to what misery has it not condemned me! I seem fated to suffer for the faults of others.”

But even as she spoke, her eye rested upon the yet scarcely covered grave of Francis Evelyn, and she involuntarily softened the reproach that had been linked with his memory. He had dearly

expiated his faults; all England now rung with rejoicing at that very event which had cost him his life in attempting to forward,—another sacrifice to that cruel and mocking destiny which rules despotic over our lower world.

The recollection of that ghastly scene oppressed Francesca still more. She trembled to think that her feet were on English ground, so much had she suffered since her first arrival. The long anxiety of Guido's illness—his death, severing her only tie of name and kindred—the utter desolation that followed—the brief period of feverish hope now so cruelly dashed to the ground—the mingled mortification and despair with which she looked to the future, might well excuse the many and heavy tears that fell on the wild flowers below.

“ I would to God,” said she, gazing earnestly upon the green sod, “ that I were laid quietly to sleep in this deep and silent home. I desire rest even more than happiness. My heart is wasted, my spirits weary. Let what may come of good, I almost doubt my power, now, to enjoy it. It matters not; earth has her step-children—the neglected and the wretched. I am one of them. Guido, my beloved Guido, oh that I were with thee!”

The sunshine had dispersed the shadows, and

faded itself into the dim twilight, before Francesca roused from her gloomy reverie, which perhaps would have continued even longer had it not been broken by Lucy's approach, who, missing her, had sought her out to bring her a letter of Lord Avonleigh's, which ran thus :

“ DEAREST FRANCESCA,— For, if not avowedly my child, still mine in heart and truth,—I have ordered all necessary preparations to be made for your reception at the Castle, where you will be received as the Signora da Carrara, the daughter of an old Italian friend. Albert alone is aware of our nearer connexion ; he is prepared to meet you with a brother's affection, though he knows not what he owes to your generous forbearance. Command me in every thing, your affectionate

AVONLEIGH.”

There was a kindness in this letter which somewhat reassured Francesca, though she could not help wondering at the ease with which it was written. To a sensitive temper like her's, keenly alive to the feelings of others, because their knowledge had been taught by her own, nothing is more astonishing than the careless and easy manner in which the many pass over the surface, gloss over

the inquiry, and take the exertion and the sacrifice as things to be expected. Not that she in the least exaggerated the merits of her conduct; she acted as her feelings prompted—she could not have done otherwise. The very phrase of “generous forbearance” shocked her as overstrained; but she did marvel that Lord Avonleigh felt neither pained nor embarrassed in a situation where such sensations seemed inevitable.

“The answer, as you were not within,” said Lucy, “will be sent for in an hour. But what is this, dear, that the page said of preparations making for your reception at the Castle? Are we going to lose you? Dear, dear Francesca, you do not know how I shall miss you!”

“Mr. Aubyn,” answered Francesca, with a faint smile, “will soon console you, and we shall still be near neighbours.”

“But do,” exclaimed Lucy, “tell me all about it.”

“There is very little to tell,” replied her companion, with hesitation, for falsehood to her noble and ingenuous temper was as distressing as new; “I am the daughter of an old friend of Lord Avonleigh’s, who repays kindness and affection to himself by promised kindness and affection to me.”

“And so you will live at the Castle! Ah!

how happy you are going to be—it is the most beautiful place in the world!”

“Not quite,” replied Francesca, smiling in spite of herself. “But we must make haste home, or what will Charles Aubyn say when he finds your haunted chamber lonely?”

“I wonder what he will do!” replied Lucy, who had a true girl’s pleasure in talking of her lover.

And this wonder, together with anticipations for Francesca, in which Francesca could not join, enabled them to reach home without finding the path too long.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ With that she struck her on the lips,
 So died double red ;
 Hard was the heart that gave the blow —
 Sweet were the lips that bled.”

Ballad of Faire Rosamunde.

“ It is well you have returned home to dinner,” exclaimed Albert, as he caught sight of his father in the avenue, and ran forwards to meet him, “ or I must have starved ; since eating before my curiosity is satisfied is quite out of the question. You have been the whole morning at Lawrence Aylmer’s, and I hear that he has had for months past the most beautiful stranger residing under his roof. Like the wandering princess of an old romance, no one knows who she is, or where she came from, only that she arrived with a brother to whom she was devotedly attached, but who died a few months after their landing. Now, my dear father, do give me a full and particular account of this mysterious beauty. They say that she is evidently noble—surely she is not going to live for ever at the farm ?”

“ She is going to take up her abode with us,” replied his father.

“ In what capacity ?” asked the youth, laughing.

“ To every one else,” said Lord Avonleigh, “ as the daughter of an old friend ; to you, as your sister.”

“ My sister !” exclaimed Albert.

“ Your sister. It is a long and mournful history, and one whose repetition I would fain be spared ; but we have all our faults and our follies, and, take my word for it, boy, that we pay dearly enough for the latter. She is my daughter—friendless and unprotected ; and it were hard that the innocent should suffer for the guilty.”

It is odd how easily the common-places of morality or of sentiment glide off in conversation. Well, they are “ exceedingly helpful,” and so Lord Avonleigh found them.

“ Poor girl !” continued he, “ she has known much adversity—we must at least be kind to her.”

“ Indeed we will,” exclaimed Albert, eager with all the ready affection of youth ; “ I have always wished for a sister—I am sure I shall like her so much.”

“ But remember, Albert,” added his father, “ I rely on your discretion. To you alone is intrusted the secret of her birth.”

“ My dear father, can you doubt my prudence ?” said the youth, with a little air of pleasure at being thought worthy of confidence.

The next day brought Francesca to the Castle. Of all concerned, she felt most at parting from Lawrence Aylmer’s kind and accustomed roof. Lucy, though her tears fell fast when it came to actually bidding good-by, yet was too deeply impressed with what she considered her friend’s good fortune to feel regret beyond the present. Besides, she was more than consoled by Lord Avonleigh’s declaration, that they should all attend her wedding in the following week : it was impossible to be very miserable with such a prospect before her.

But Francesca felt a deep depression. Here was another great change in her life ; and how little encouragement could she draw from its predecessors ! None had been for the better. She had quitted the lovely and quiet scenes of her youth for the vexation and vanity of Paris—what a period of fever and disappointment had it been ! She had sought England, to see the grave close over the only human being linked to her by ties of blood and long affection—and to find a father who feared to acknowledge her—and to enter another home, as a stranger and as a dependant.

She had all life to begin over again, without the buoyancy or the hope that render its path endurable, and which surmount difficulties, by colouring them with those pleasant hues of delusion which make the yoke of existence easy, and its burden light.

Accustomed to the airy and cheerful architecture of Italy, cheerful even in its decay—for the proportion is still perfect in its grace, and luxuriant nature hides the ravages of time—or to the gay crowds which fixed attention upon themselves in the courtly hotels of Paris—and of late to the air of occupation and of comfort in Aylmer's house,—a strange sense of oppression came over Francesca as she entered the gloomy baronial hall of Avonleigh. The high narrow windows shed shadows rather than light below; the carved walls were black with time; and the armour hung around suggested no images but those of warfare and death. Many of the figures, clad in mail from head to foot, were ranged above the dais; and she could almost fancy a skeleton form beneath, or that wild and fearful eyes glared through the apertures of the closed visors. The hall was cold, too, and chilled her southern temperament almost like unkindness.

“Is this my welcome,” thought she, “to my

father's house?—is it an omen?" She wished to hurry through the Gothic space, complaining of the cold, to the discontent of both father and brother, especially the latter, who delighted in the legends attached to every weapon or scutcheon on the wall. They forgot that the early associations which had made their interest were blanks to Francesca; but her indifference was quite enough to put them out of temper—and both were too self-willed to conceal it. In the meantime, unconscious of her offence, poor Francesca could only wonder within herself at the change in their manner, and assign it to every cause but the right one.

She was conducted to her own apartment; and as she braided back her hair and changed her dress, it was well for her that the young waiting-maid appointed to attend her was more alive to the duties of the toilette than her mistress; for, depressed and bewildered, Francesca scarcely knew what she was doing. Still, when she entered the supper-room, no longer muffled up in her riding-hood and cloak, though pale, and her eyes heavy with unshed tears, neither Lord Avonleigh nor his son could restrain an exclamation of delight at her exceeding beauty. Albert's good humour, too, was completely restored; for the falcon, alluded to at an earlier period of the narrative, had been

brought to the Castle, and he was full of gratitude and pleasure. Supper passed off more cheerfully than could have been expected ; but its after-conversation drove the blood from Francesca's cheek to her heart, there to fever with anxiety, or freeze with fear.

“ So I hear,” said Lord Avonleigh, “ that young Roundhead, Robert Evelyn, is excluded by name from the general pardon. But for him, that vacillating Henry Cromwell would have proclaimed Charles Stuart in Dublin upon his father's death.”

“ Is he a prisoner ?” asked Albert, while Francesca gasped for breath.

“ No ; but he is too dangerous to be let escape so easily. It is amazing what a hold those Evelyns have on the peasantry in this county ; glad am I that we are to be rid of them, for I hate the very name.”

“ Francis was shot by that mad fanatic Johnstone,” added Albert, turning to his sister, “ before Aylmer's door—did you see any thing of the prisoner ?”

“ Nay,” interrupted Lord Avonleigh, “ this is not the most agreeable subject wherewith to entertain our guest ; you will have ample time to talk over every event that ever happened to either. I see

that the Signora da Carrara looks fatigued. Albert, will you call her attendants?"

"Yes," replied the youth, "and light her myself through all our endless galleries."

Tears rose to Francesca's eyes at even this slight mark of kindness. Albert noticed them, for long indulgence had not yet wrought its usual work of hardness and indifference; and, taking her hand kindly in his, he said, as he led her along, "We are all very new and strange to you now; but we shall be such friends soon! Good night, my sweet sister."

Francesca felt too much to speak; but her grateful look gave Albert more pleasure than any words. Almost immediately dismissing her attendant, she sat down in a large carved oaken settle that was drawn close by the hearth, where the wood-fire threw a multitude of fantastic shapes in rapidly changing shadows around. It was scarcely possible to imagine a more gloomy chamber. The purple velvet curtains of the bed looked almost black in the dim light, and heavy plumes of hearse-like feathers drooped from each corner. The floor of polished wood gave no relief to the general dulness; and the walls were hung with tapestry, where the ghastly figures, large as

life, waved to and fro with a human likeness which yet seemed to mock humanity.

It represented the history of Fair Rosamond, one of those legends which take that hold on the popular imagination which love and crime usually do when stamped by death, and chronicled in the simple poetry which is the truest echo of the heart. In the first compartment, she was sitting with her maidens, binding up flowers; and, rude as were the outlines, and harsh the tints, the artist had well contrived to express the attention they were giving to their simple employment,—an attention that could only be given by the easily pleased, and the light-hearted. But a cavalier, who was gazing on them from the back-ground, seemed to indicate that one at least would soon find that there could be a deeper interest excited than that taken in binding a garland of lilies. In the next, that period had already arrived. A maiden was seated apart from her companions, the very flowers scattered neglected by her side; but it was obvious that idlesse—that first sweet symptom of love—was pleasanter than her graceful task; for the colour was rich upon her cheek, and the smile parted her scarce conscious lips. In the third, a cavalier was kneeling at her feet, while the downcast eye, and the yielded hand, betrayed that his suit was

granted almost before it was asked. To this succeeded a splendid banquetting room. The cavalier and the maiden are seated beneath a royal canopy, and the cavalier wears the insignia of his high station. Rosamond is at his side, her hand still clasped in his; the gems are bright in her braided hair, and neck and arms are laden with orient pearls: but her cheek is paler than its wont, and the soft blue eyes have a look of care far different from what they wore when but heeding how best the primrose and the violet might consort together. This was followed by the parting between the frail Rose and her royal lover. The spur is on his heel, and the sword at his side;—honour with a knight is stronger than love, and he must go—yet she clings to his arm—alas! why may not she accompany him! Henry's face is averted; but the agony on that of his unhappy mistress is terrible—it is the desolation of a life. Next you saw her alone, a kneeling penitent at the foot of the crucifix; her long fair hair is unbound, and the sackcloth robe is girded by a cord round her slender shape: her hands are clasped, and tears are flowing fast from the quenched radiance of those shadowy eyes; no penitence can avail the still cherished sin, and no humiliation express the depths of her self-conscious degradation. She looks

above, but it is in despair, not hope ; she weeps, yet dares not pray, for the image of Henry is in her heart even while prostrate before the image of her Saviour. The scene changes—it is the banquet-room again. Another sits beneath the purple canopy—a lady, but alone. The diadem is on her cold and haughty brow ; there is no pity in her stern aspect, and the smile on her lip bodes death. Before her stands the lovely culprit, whose fatal beauty, and still more fatal love, are about to be dearly requited. Her mouth is yet red with the blow of the vindictive Queen ; but her eye, if sad, is calm, and her cheek, though pale, is resolved. The dark cup is in her hand—she has turned aside from the dagger—it is too cruel a weapon for her gentle clasp.

Francesca, who knew not the story, gazed eagerly on the last compartment. It is a little chapel, where the mourners are ranged, torch in hand, and at the altar the robed priests are chanting the service for a departed soul. An old man stands near, but his face is buried in his cloak ; and in the midst, laid upon an open bier, is the fair Rosamond. The decent shroud hides that perfect form ; and two long braids of hair, parted on the white forehead, extend their length even to her feet. Death has not yet subdued the

beauty of that angel face ; it has come upon it like a lovely sleep, but sad, very sad, for their dying look is still upon the features. A king is kneeling by that coffin — one who would give his crown to restore life but for a day to those pale lips — to ask their latest wish — to implore pardon — and to say farewell ! In vain King Henry bends in speechless despair over his victim and his love.

“ Every where the same ! ” exclaimed Francesca, as she resumed her seat — “ the same human misery — the same human portion ! The loud wind, which I now hear howling around the battlements, seems but a mighty echo of the universal plaint wrung from mortal suffering. I would to Heaven, that if this is to be my chamber, it were hung with a less mournful history ! A place for rest and sleep to be perpetually haunted by such misery as I see pictured there — and one grief ever brings another to mind — how many sorrowful records of my own land does that tapestry recall ! Alas ! amid so many instances of ever-recurring wretchedness, how can I hope that an exception will be made in my favour ? ”

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ Oh, weary heart, that must within itself
Close all its deepest leaves.”

L. E. L.

A FEW days brought time into that general routine of small observances which make up ordinary existence; but never had Francesca felt herself in a more uncongenial atmosphere. There was a littleness and an indolence about Lord Avonleigh which—unless concealed by the magic of long association, when affection is matter of habit—were insuperable barriers to attachment. Had Francesca grown up by his side, she would have loved him; and a thousand indulgences, the result of careless good-nature, would have linked the child to the parent, till the mutual affection would have become a thing of course. But he was not one whom you could begin to love with the judgment ripened and the feelings accustomed to examination. Albert was much more an object of interest;

but, with a naturally noble and generous nature, his faults were precisely of a kind that made daily life wretched. He was arrogant, petulant, and self-willed; every thing was expected to fly before him; and though, after an ebullition of passion, no penitence was held too great on his part, still the hasty word had been said, the wound inflicted, and still the offence was soon repeated. One perpetual source of annoyance, too, was her father's continual allusion to the Evelyns. He seemed to hate the name with a hate which was the only strong feeling he possessed. The truth was, that he had been humiliated by the superiority of both father and son; and with the genuine ingratitude of a little mind, he could not forgive the kind offices which he owed to both. Uncertain of what Robert Evelyn might now feel towards her—sometimes almost tempted, for his sake, to wish that he might have changed—it will easily be supposed that Francesca's most treasured secret never passed her lips—ah! the solitude but added to its strength. Deep, unutterably deep, is the love treasured in the hidden heart, on which the eye never looks, and of which no tongue ever tells.

A few days brought Lucy's wedding; and Francesca was with her early in the morning.

The important duties of the toilette passed under her inspection. The white silk dress was her own gift; but that was nothing to the attention which devoted itself to the graceful adjustment of its drapery. It is in our nature to be much more grateful for that which flatters than for that which serves us—perhaps because the latter implies the superiority of another, while the former insinuates our own. The bride looked very pretty—with her golden hair allowed to hang beneath the veil, and a cheek whose blushes were of the most orthodox brightness; and the bridegroom appeared as happy as awkwardness and confusion could indicate. “But after all,” thought Francesca, “a wedding is a melancholy affair. How much responsibility is in those few and scarcely audible words which give away your very life to the keeping of another! What a sudden change is wrought in existence!—a change whose consequences none may foresee. It is standing on the threshold of youth, and flinging its flowers behind you. The ideal merges at once in the real, and the dream, at least, of love is over. Well if the substance depart not with the shadow!”

With irrepressible emotion Francesca thought upon the desolate home now left for the father; the accustomed music of Lucy's step was gone

from his floor for ever. When next she trod there, it would be as a visitor. The long and lonely evenings that he would have to pass—no fair and cherished face to raise up images of hope and affection, whenever he chanced to look in its direction—alas! how many other ties must be broken to link the strong and engrossing one of love! She felt this most keenly when, after Charles Aubyn had led Lucy away, they themselves took their departure, and she saw Lawrence Aylmer walk slowly down the garden with a loitering step, and saw more than once his hand dashed across his eyes, as if for him there remained no object in the world. Pity became a far truer feeling than congratulation.

It is a painful thing to think how the purest and dearest tie that can exist—that which binds the parent to the child, and the child to the parent—is doomed to sever by the very course of nature: that a new and vivid emotion will inevitably enter the heart of youth—and before that emotion, how cold and faint seems all that was held precious before! And yet, so inextricably blended are happiness and sorrow on our earth, that fortunate, thrice fortunate, are they who have such ties to sever.

“ You seem quite out of spirits to-day,” said

Lord Avonleigh, when they met at supper. "But never mind, Francesca—I dare say we shall be able to find you a husband in England."

Is there aught more provoking than the misinterpretation of our saddest thoughts? However, Francesca forced a smile, and endeavoured to answer the raillery in which he continued to indulge, while her spirits felt more and more depressed at every word. What an extraordinary mental delusion jesting is—that sort of laboured vivacity which fancies it is pointed when it is only personal; and more extraordinary still, it is always the resource of stupid people. "Take any shape but that!" is what I always feel tempted to exclaim when dulness attempts a joke; striving to pervert some poor innocent and ill-used word from its lawful meaning till it ceases to have any at all—worrying some unfortunate idea till, like the hunted hare, it is worried to death—dealing in witticisms whose edge has long since been worn off by constant use; and truly, to the many, witticisms not only require to be explained, like riddles, but are also like new shoes, which people require to wear many times before they get accustomed to them. No, let the generality inflict upon you histories of themselves and their kind, even to the third and fourth generation—let them

talk of their feelings, when they mean their temper—let them, for the hundred and fiftieth time, dilate on the lovers who made the delight of their youth, or the receipts which make the glory of their age—let them even give advice—let them do any thing but jest—“the power of patience can no farther go.”

It is said that the name of Love is often taken in vain, compelled to stand godfather to feelings with which he has nothing to do, and made answerable for all the faults and follies which interest, vanity, and idleness commit while masquerading under such semblance. Wit is just as much put upon—blamed for a thousand impertinences over which it would not have held for a moment its glittering shield; it is like the radiant fairy doomed to wander over earth, concealed and transformed, and only allowed on rare occasions to shine forth in its true and sparkling form. It is well that wit is an impalpable and ethereal substance, or it must long since have evaporated in indignation at that peculiarly wretched and mistaken race, its imitators.

CHAPTER XIX.

“ Bring flowers, pale flowers, o’er the bier to shed ;
A crown for the brow of the early dead.”

THE next morning Francesca was seated at one of the windows with her father, occasionally talking in the hope of amusing him, but often allowing her attention to be drawn to the scene before her. It was the atmosphere and heaven of summer redeeming the winter spread over the earth—just one of those glad and genial days with which November sometimes delights to mock itself. The sky was of that deep rich blue which is brought out so vividly by the few scattered white clouds, whose vapours are soft as if dew, not rain, were gathered in those snowy masses. Beneath, the grass of the park was of the brightest emerald, while the sunbeams chased one another over the undulating herbage, as if rejoicing in their prolonged dominion, and unwilling to waste one

moment of their brief and brilliant empire. The lake lay before them sparkling and silvery, and the eye could just catch the swans, outlined in light, not shadow, in their graceful progress over their own domain. The majority of the trees were leafless, but many yet wore a cheerful array of green. The holly upreared its shining leaves—the ivy drooped from the older stems, a dream of their once lovely youth—and the mistletoe crept round many of the oaks—that pleasant parasite, whose associations belong rather to the hearth and lighted hall than to its native branches. The gay singing of the birds came wakened by the soft west wind; and immediately before the window, a robin, with its scarlet plumage and dear soft eye, was picking up the crumbs which Francesca had flung from the breakfast-table.

Nor did the scene lack human life and human action. In the foreground Albert was trying the mettle of a horse that had been a recent purchase. The eye of father and sister alike forgot every other object while watching the evolutions of the young and graceful boy, who realised the descriptions of romance as, his golden curls dancing on the wind, his cheek flushed with exercise, and his large blue eyes dilated and flashing with triumph, he ruled the snow-white palfrey by a wave of the

hand and an imperceptible pressure of the knee. It seemed as if the docile creature intuitively divined his will. Francesca looked from the youth to the fair domain which was his portion: it was but a moment, and her attention again fixed upon him—but it was mingled now with many sad questionings of fate. Never before had she seemed to feel so keenly the inequalities of human allotment. “Why should Guido have perished in his youth?” she inwardly exclaimed. “Why should Robert Evelyn be an exile from the home of his fathers?—and why should I be doomed to waste the best years of my life, and the deepest feelings of my heart, in anxiety and neglect, while fortune lavishes every gift upon a favourite? Albert has never known a real care nor a real sorrow; and every earthly advantage conspires to the promise of his future. Alas! how much is there in life of which he little dreams!—and God forbid that its bitterest lessons should ever come within his experience! May that brow long wear its present glad openness, and those clear eyes long remain unshadowed! Methinks they are their own omen.”

While this train of thoughts were passing in her mind, a favourite greyhound was seen coursing rapidly through the park. Catching at once a sight of his master, the dog came bounding forwards,

and sprung up at the horse's side. The palfrey was startled, and dashed off at full gallop.

“How gallantly he sits!” exclaimed Lord Avonleigh, as the agile figure of his son cut through the air, till the eye was dazzled with the rapidity of the motion. A moment after, a cry broke from the lips of both. The horse rushes under the drooping boughs of an old oak—the young rider reels in his seat—the bridle falls from his grasp—his arms extend helplessly—and the next bound flings him to the earth. Neither Francesca nor Lord Avonleigh dared to exchange glances, but both sprung forwards and ran to the place, where the palfrey, panting and trembling as if with some mysterious instinct of evil, stood beside the prostrate corse—for corse it was! In one short instant the hope of youth had been laid low—and the beautiful temple, where a parent had garnered up all that made life precious, was dust and ashes. There he lay, his face turned towards them, pale as a statue, but sweet as sleep. The sudden summons had assuredly been unfelt—the only sign was a slight wound on the fair forehead, whence trickled a small stream of blood, which had already reddened the bright ringlets and the green grass. Lord Avonleigh stood as if the same blow had struck him also—conscious

that a weight of horror was upon him, but stunned by an agony too great to bear. Francesca sunk on her knees, and raised the inanimate head in her arms. At first she did not believe the worst; but she looked on those white set features and knew there was an end of all!

The servants now crowded round, and carried the body to the house. Lord Avonleigh followed mechanically; but he staggered, and his daughter offered to support him. Almost fiercely he repulsed her aid, and walked on with a hurried and uncertain step. Poor Francesca!—the bitterness which swelled in her heart!—“He is no father in his love towards me!”

The leech was summoned when they reached the Castle. He could but give one look at the piteous spectacle and turn away: the father needed his skill—the son no more.

“Let the horse and the hound be destroyed at once!” were Lord Avonleigh’s only words; and that order given, he sought the chamber where they had laid his child, and throwing himself on the bed, gave way to the wildest expressions of despair. Francesca knelt—she wept at his feet, and implored him to have pity on his own soul; but it was in vain. About midnight he slept, exhausted with his own violence—slept beside the extended corse!

It was a fearful vigil that Francesca kept—for the office of watching in the chamber of death she had taken upon herself. How often, during her young life, had she looked upon the face of the dead!—it was now almost more familiar than the living. Again she marked the still repose, the calm, cold hue, the superhuman beauty, the look which is not of this world, here strongly contrasted by the troubled countenance of Lord Avonleigh. Sleep lacked the quiet of death. The veins were swollen on his temples—the dew rose on his knit brow—his cheek was livid, not pale—and the inward struggle convulsed every feature. The torches flung round their long and fantastic shadows, while the wind howled amid the battlements—a wild, shrieking wind, like a great cry of nature's agony. Yet there the young Italian waited and watched alone, dreading her ghastly solitude, but dreading still more the despair of her father's awakening. And terrible indeed was that awakening: it was the desperate grief of the prosperous, who have not dreamed that the arrows of calamity can be pointed at them—whose sky has been sunshine, and whose pathway over flowers, till the ordinary lot of mankind seems to them an injustice. They look not to drink of that cup which is measured unto all—to others they apply the

rule, and to themselves the exception. But, alas for the graceful and noble boy, on whom nature and fortune had lavished every gift but to make a richer prize for death! How many lofty hopes, how many generous emotions, how many joyous aspirings, were quenched in that unfulfilled destiny! That young heart had had no time to harden—that young soul no time to chill; warm and fresh, true and kindling, they went down to the grave, all trace of paradise not worn away in the brief career.

“Whom the gods love die young,” is one of the truths taught by the old Greek poets—those poets half sage, half seer. And methinks, that though tears are shed abundantly when the coffin-lid presses down some fair and bright head, we were wiser did we keep those tears for the living. Let the young perish in their hour of promise—how much will they be spared!—passion, that kindles but to consume the heart, and leaves either vacancy or regret, a ruin or a desert; ambition, that only reaches its goal to find it worthless when gained, or but the starting-place for another feverish race, doomed again to end in disappointment; enemies that cross us at every step; friends that deceive—and what friends do not?—the blighted hope, the embittered feeling, the wasted powers, the re-

morse, and the despair;—all these are spared by the merciful, the early grave.

The week passed, with its days, like ghosts, flitting by in silence and awe, till at length came the evening when Albert Lord Stukeley was to be laid to the long last sleep of his ancestry. The red glare of the tapers flung a strange unnatural hue on the painted windows of the little Gothic chapel, where none slept save the noble of name, and the high of blood—purple and crimson, the colours mingled together in fantastic combinations, till the rainbow-hued figures seemed to move with supernatural life. The banners hung from the roof, —frail and faded memorials of a glory which now formed the archives of a house, instead of the history of a nation. Tablet and escutcheon were suspended from the walls; and below were the sculptured tombs, each with its marble effigy. Here was the armed knight, his head upon his shield, his foot on his hound,—the image having long survived the original; the one yet gave a stern likeness of humanity, the other was now but a handful of dust, ready to be dispersed by the first breath of air that might penetrate its carved sepulchre. How much of empty distinction above mocked the nothingness below! Here was the storied trophy, the blazoned arms, the

name, with its array of titles—the inscription, with its long flattery; and there was only the mouldering bones, and the dank vapour. God of heaven! how mortality mocks itself!—how far extends the solemnity of its foolishness, the vain-gloriousness of its delusion! The living console themselves by the honours which they pay to the dead; and yet this self-deceit is not all in vain. Every feeling that looks to the future elevates human nature; for life is never so low or so little as when it concentrates itself on the present. The miserable wants, the small desires, and the petty pleasures of daily existence have nothing in common with those mighty dreams which, looking forward for action and action's reward, redeem the earth over which they walk with steps like those of an angel, beneath which spring up glorious and immortal flowers. The imagination is man's noblest and most spiritual faculty; and that ever dwells on the to-come.

But to return to the Gothic chapel, and its mournful solemnities. A strain of music reverberated along the arches as a gloomy train entered, faces and shapes alike hidden in their black and sweeping garments. In the midst was the coffin, covered with a white velvet pall, on which was embroidered a golden border of the arms of

the house of Avonleigh. The lid was closed—human eye had looked its last on that young and beloved face. That glance would dwell on the memory for ever,—pale, calm, and unearthly. Well that it should be so; for who could bear to have their midnight haunted by the vision of corruption? The music ceased; slowly the bearers deposited their burden before the altar; and the deep melodious voice of Charles Aubyn was heard repeating the holy words which sanctify the act that restores the corse to its mother earth. Lord Avonleigh sat at the head of the coffin, and, in the negligence of sorrow, his cloak had fallen to the ground, and his countenance, fixed and rigid with despair, was fully given to view. It was awful—for suffering in its extreme is awful—to mark how a few days had changed him. Francesca knelt at his side, but he turned not towards her; and mute and motionless she listened to the service—only an occasional large bright drop falling through her closed hands told that she was weeping. The voice of the reader paused for a moment. Again the bearers took up the coffin, and cold and damp the subterranean air came from the opened vault. The tapers were lowered, and shed a ghastly light on the rows of piled coffins, and the moisture glittering on the walls. A

shudder ran through the assembly as all looked towards that drear receptacle.

“One moment!” said Lord Avonleigh, in a low hoarse whisper: “that boy perished for my sin, —I feel, I know that his death was a judgment upon me. Let him be the inanimate witness of an atonement that comes too late. Francesca Stukeley, I here entreat your forgiveness of the wrong which I have done you, prompted by my dear love for him who is no more. Cruelly has Providence visited it upon me. In the presence of the dead and of the living, I acknowledge you as my only lawful child!”

A murmur of astonishment ran through the chapel. It was hushed instantly, for, at a sign from Lord Avonleigh, the coffin was carried into the vault; and again the voice of the priest was the only sound, breathing the last and solemn benediction of the mournful obsequies.

CHAPTER XX.

“ He who commands me to mine own content,
Commands me to the thing I cannot find.”

SHAKESPEARE.

WE must entreat our readers to suppose that the following few winter months glided away in all the unmarked monotony of usual existence. How little does what we wished fulfil, when realised, what we expected. But a brief period passed, and Francesca would have held that her present position was all that could be dreamed—all that could be desired. Acknowledged child of a noble house—heiress to its name, and to its wealth—young and beautiful—it was as if some good fairy had stood godmother to her fortune. So much for the outward seeming. But whoso had paused here had left the story but half told. Young she was, but the buoyancy of youth had departed from her for ever—her spirits were broken by care, sorrow, and the frequent presence of death; beautiful, but she was not vain,—and what recked she

of the fair face on which one beloved eye seemed never fated to rest again? Rank she had; but he to whom it equalled her was now an exile; and wealth—but what of that, unless it could be shared with Robert Evelyn? Alas, how little chance did there seem to be of their ever meeting! He had been excepted by name from the general amnesty—would never, in all human probability, hear of his brother's treachery—and could look upon her in no other light than as ungrateful and inconstant. She had not the poor comfort of thinking that he dwelt upon her memory,—even in heart they were separated.

Drearly did the winter exhaust itself, equally without interest and without occupation. It was obvious that Lord Avonleigh considered the past entirely expiated by his tardy acknowledgment; he had given justice, but his daughter also asked affection—that he gave not, and indeed had it not to give. He associated her in idea with his lost son, and, by a strange and unjust connexion, in a degree reproached her as the cause of his bereavement. Common minds always blame some one or other for every misfortune that happens; complaint relieves them, and their style of complaint is always personal. And yet it was wonderful how he got over the loss; he soon fell into his ordinary round of

employments and amusements, spoke of going to Whitehall in the spring, and dwelt with increasing animation on his hopes of a marquise. When he talked of Albert, it was rather talking at Francesca, as if she were to be made responsible for the death of her brother. Ah, that talking at!—only those who have suffered from it can understand its wearing and petty misery, especially when placed in circumstances which forbid reply.

We are eloquent about oppression on a large scale,—we deprecate the tyranny of government, which, after all, extends but to few; and yet how little pity is bestowed upon those who suffer from that worst of tyranny in daily practice in daily life. What grievances would not most family histories disclose!—how much comfort is put aside—how much kindly feeling wasted, by the arbitrary cruelties of temper! I say cruelties; for what torture of rack or wheel can equal that of words? Take the annals of the majority of hearths for a twelvemonth, and we should be amazed at the quantity of wretchedness that would be writ in them, if writ truly.

Francesca felt every hour more keenly the pain of her unappreciated affection, of her unvalued existence. All the higher faculties of her mind lay utterly dormant. No one entered into

her emotions, no one took note of her thoughts. The atmosphere of indifference clipped her round like a prison, but from which there was no escape. No imagination could defy the dull monotony in which days upon days wore away. It was some relief to go and see Lucy, who was practising domestic felicity as it is practised at first. It is not in the deep passion, the keen feeling, the thoughtful mind, that are sown the seeds of earthly enjoyments. They are flowers that take root best in the light soil.

Lucy was the *beau ideal* of simple content—delighted with her husband, delighted with her house, finding a little accession of dignity in the idea of being married, and having already discovered that servants were a great trouble, it being scarcely possible to get good ones—a complaint which, we believe, is the usual after-dinner talk of all married ladies even in our own time.

Francesca thought Charles Aubyn a little more wearisome in his capacity of husband than he had been in that of lover; perhaps because he addressed more of his discourse to herself. He had now to do the honours of his house; and he conceived that he supported the dignity of the clerical character by long statements of his own opinions, exaggerated and confused enough, but listened to

by his pretty wife with a face of charmed attention.

Well, nature makes some wise provisions, it must be confessed. We should be envious of other's happiness if, in nine cases out of ten, we did not despise it. Francesca felt Lucy's pleasant lot; but felt, also, that such would not have suited herself.

In the meantime, Lord Avonleigh found a wonderful resource in being loyal; he attended county meetings, denounced the Puritans, discouraged conventicles, discountenanced long graces or long sermons, and was seized with a sudden veneration for the church as established by law, which led to fines and imprisonment on all absentees from worship as ordained by law. Hitherto the commanding influence of Sir Robert Evelyn's character had sunk his own into insignificance—now he had no “rival near the throne,” *alias* the bench of county magistrates. It was amazing how much more discontent, however, accrued under the management of the good-natured Lord Avonleigh, than under the resolved, nay, somewhat stern Sir Robert Evelyn. The truth is, the one never swerved one inch from what he held to be the right; while the other had a thousand whims, favourites, prejudices, and interests, all to be gra-

tified or conciliated. Complaints became of daily recurrence, and it was said that a great portion of the tenants on the Evelyn estate contemplated emigration on a large scale. But the Castle was not destined to remain long in its present quietude.

One morning Lord Avonleigh received a packet from London, whose contents filled him with joy, which he could not communicate in too great haste. It contained a letter from the King himself, craving hospitality for a few days, as his mother was about to visit England, and to take up with Lord Avonleigh her residence at the Castle. A slight incognito would be preserved, and as little form and ceremony expected as was possible. Language was quite inadequate to express the Earl's feelings on the occasion; he was a marquess already in idea, and the Castle itself was soon in as great confusion as his own thoughts, for no preparations seemed to be sufficient. Hitherto the recent death of Lord Stukeley had rendered seclusion necessary; but the now comforted parent was not sorry to have a decent pretext for enlivening a solitude very uncongenial to his taste. Among other names on their list of visitors was that of the Comtesse de Soissons. How many recollections were connected with that name! However unkindly neglected by that early

friend, still her image was associated with all that had been most interesting in Francesca's life; and so little had she now to love, that she looked forward, not only with forgiveness of the past, but even with pleasure to a renewal of their former feelings. Ah! the past is the true source of confidence. We must recollect together before we can confide.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ You’re very welcome.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE change which had so suddenly elevated Charles Stuart to the throne of his ancestors, and, from a poor, wandering, and powerless exile, made him one of Europe’s most powerful monarchs, had taken the various courts where he had sojourned, neglected, if not contemned, completely by surprise. None saw the error more clearly than Mazarin; and none, therefore, were more prompt to repair it; while no one could be less troubled with any false delicacy which might suggest that the change was somewhat barefaced, nor so little deterred by any scruples lest the interested motives should be too apparent. Laughing openly and secretly at the principles which he called prejudices—very good for the many, but never meant for the few—flattery and bribery were the two great levers by which mankind were to be moved; and if these

failed, why it must be set down, not to him, but to Fate.

“Would to St. Peter,” he sometimes exclaimed, “that the offices of priest and prophet had been united, as of old, in my person! My niece would now be Queen of that island, whose worst fault is that it never knows its own mind, and whose politics are as uncertain as its climate. France would now have an ally, instead of an enemy that has hitherto been a thorn in her side. Well, well, who can foresee the impossible?—and impossible it appeared to all rational calculation that these raving fanatics should suddenly veer round, and become as mad on loyalty as they were on doctrine. We must do what we can; beauty and gold can still accomplish much, or his recent majesty has strangely altered.”

To form a strict alliance between the cabinets of Paris and London—which meant, that he should influence both,—to induce Charles to marry the loveliest of his nieces, Hortense—thus making a common interest between them, were now the great objects with the Cardinal; and the present visit was of his projecting. The Queen Mother, Henriette, was strongly in the French interest. Nothing ever seems to have taught her the character of the English nation; and at this very

time she considered an alliance with France as Charles's best security for remaining on what she thought his most uncertain throne. The marriage, too, met her approval; the dower offered was enormous; and she was, moreover, influenced by the present flattery of the Mazarin family; and intending, as she did, to fix her residence in France, there might be a little private wish to conciliate, on her part, the powers that were. There was another motive, too, the most powerful of all—she was devotedly attached to the young princess, her only daughter; and the lure held out, of her marriage with Monsieur, was the strongest inducement to secure her warmest efforts in a cause likely to promote a project so dear to her hopes. Madame de Soissons attended her, for the Cardinal thought he could trust her talents for intrigue. Moreover, her going was a sufficient reason for Hortense accompanying her; and Mazarin hoped as much from her beautiful face as from all the other potent reasons with which he had charged his negotiators.

In the Queen Mother's suite was Lord Craven, one of those most devoted lovers who sometimes illumine the page of history with an episode which seems taken from the olden chronicles of chivalry. It is the fate of some women to inspire those deep

yet picturesque attachments, which, amid all the ordinary prose of life, need to be well authenticated to be believed. Henriette was one of these ;—poetry records nothing more ideal than the passion with which she inspired Lord Craven, who sought the Holy Land to forget the too lovely queen, and only returned to his own to risk his life in her service. Even now, faded by age, but still more by sorrow, Lord Craven esteemed existence but given to be spent in her service—his time, his wealth, were lavished for her sake. We need only add the name of the Chevalier de Joinville, as Francesca's old acquaintance, and leave the rest unmentioned. .

The whole party left Dieppe early, and a favourable wind soon carried them across the Channel. Yet they had to pass the Isle of Wight, which held Carisbrook Castle,—that melancholy prison which Charles I. only left for that drearier cell which was but the passage to the scaffold. Lord Craven, however, contrived that they should be in the cabin when the island appeared in sight.

The Queen knew nothing of the environs, and it was dusk when they landed. Lord Avonleigh was in anxious attendance—carriages were ready for the whole suite—lamps and torches were soon kindled—and they arrived at his residence about midnight. It had a noble effect, as a hundred at-

tendants, each with torch in hand, lined the avenue, whose yet leafless boughs were dark with night if not with foliage. The red glare on their path but made more beautiful the silvery moonlight, which rested unbroken on the park around, across which bounded the deer, roused from their quiet sleep by the unwonted intrusion on the silent night. A blaze of fireworks kindled the whole atmosphere, while the stately battlements shone distinct as at noon, when the Queen alighted; and at the foot of the flight of steps which led to the hall, Francesca was in waiting at the head of the female attendants. She knelt while her father presented her.

“Nay!” exclaimed Henriette, “I cannot allow homage where I would only receive kindness.”

Lord Avonleigh accepted the gracious speech with a due return of acknowledgment. They passed on, and his daughter was left to do the honours of welcome to the other guests. The light of the illuminated arch raised above fell direct on her face; and, attired in the splendour which suited her own rank and the occasion, never perhaps had she appeared to greater advantage. Her long black hair was left, according to the fashion then prevalent—the more prevalent from the complete contrast which it offered to the close

cap and banded tresses of the Puritans—to flow in rich masses down her neck, only knotted by strings of diamonds, while a bandeau of the same precious stones crossed her forehead. Her robe was of violet satin, embroidered in black and silver; her stomacher shone with brilliants set in jet; and in one hand she held a fan formed of black feathers, confined in the middle with a diamond star.

Madame de Soissons and Lord Craven were the first of the company, and she stepped forward to receive them with the grave courtesy necessary; but her eye rested on the face of the Comtesse with a glance of recognition.

“Mon Dieu! is it possible?” exclaimed her visitor.

“Yes—how much I have to tell you!” whispered she, as she advanced to receive the others.

Astonishment was never more legibly written than in the Chevalier de Joinville’s countenance when Francesca’s smile confirmed her identity. He made no remark, but followed to the banquetting-room, which had been prepared with the utmost splendour. A canopy of crimson velvet, heavy with a deep fringe of gold, was placed over the dais, where the Queen was standing, having refused to sit till her young hostess appeared;

and then she made Francesca take her place at her side.

“ Surely we have met before ? ” said she, in a low tone, the first moment that Lord Avonleigh’s attention was forced to his other guests.

“ Yes, your Grace,” replied Francesca, “ at Compeigne.”

“ Believe me, I have not forgotten your kindness,” whispered Henriette. “ Alas! our service has indeed been fatal. Would to God that you were not the only one to whom gratitude can now be shewn ! ”

Francesca could not control her embarrassment. She perceived immediately that the Queen alluded to Francis Evelyn, and to their supposed attachment.

“ I have been placed,” said she at last, rallying her faculties, “ all my life in most peculiar circumstances. One favour I will dare to implore of your Grace—silence.”

“ Poor child ! ” said the Queen, pressing her hand in token of assent.

Here, to Francesca’s great relief, the conversation was interrupted ; for her father held the royal notice too precious to be engrossed even by his own daughter.

I remember reading a story, where some royal

dowager—utterly powerless, be it observed—resides in a small tranquil town, where she believes the golden age to be very respectably represented. Suddenly the calm current of their ordinary existence is disturbed by a visit from the reigning monarch; all the little, mean, and malevolent passions—vices, we should rather say—engendered of vanity and vexation of spirit, rise at once to the surface of the troubled waters—troubled by the demon of ambition; and the poor princess is left in mute dismay, to wonder what has become of the humility, the independence, and the content which she had so rashly eulogised.

Francesca was in much the same position with regard to her father. Accustomed to see him irritable and indifferent, she could scarcely believe the courtier, full of flattery and *empressement*, who seemed to consider himself and household but created for the Queen Henriette's pleasure.

Yet the banquet went off heavily. In the minds of some, now for the first time during many years treading their native shore, the past predominated; it was impossible to fix the thoughts on any thing but the dark record of blood, suffering, crime, and death, written on the last few years. Others, again—Madame de Soissons and the Chevalier de Joinville, usually the most enter-

taining of the company—were silent, fairly overpowered by intense curiosity; and the rest were tired to death.

All were rejoiced when the Queen rose, and, pleading extreme fatigue, entreated her host's permission to retire. Francesca attended her to her chamber, received the most flattering thanks and compliments on her reception, but was not permitted to remain.

The Queen embraced her, saying, "If we may judge of the exertion by the effect, we are sure our young hostess must need rest. We lay our royal commands upon her, that she take it as soon as possible."

Francesca expressed her deep sense of her Grace's kind consideration, and left the chamber; but rest was the farthest thing in the world from her thoughts. She was impatient to speak to the Comtesse de Soissons, for the ties of an old friendship are not easily broken; and her very sight brought back a thousand remembrances of their joyful childhood, and their once confiding youth, which effectually pleaded the cause of reconciliation.

With her first touch at the door of the dressing-room it was opened. Marie seemed to have divined the intended visit,—the one felt that she was

forgiven, and the other that such forgiveness was welcome. The attendants were dismissed; and each, drawing a huge arm-chair to the blazing hearth, began eagerly to question and reply. A few words gave the general outline of Francesca's history, and Marie was warm in her congratulations.

“ A *véritable princesse de roman!* I must give Madame de Scuderi the story on my return. Dearest Francesca, you are situated as you ought to be; you look your rank. You were *superbe* as you received us at the entrance. We want nothing but a hero to complete the romance.”

Francesca shook her head mournfully, and the conversation flagged a little. Marie seemed to hesitate with some question, which she yet shrunk from asking. At length, holding up her handkerchief, as if to screen her face from the fire, but more to screen it from her companion, she said, in a low uncertain tone, “ I do not see him here: has Guido returned to Italy?”

“ Italy!” replied Francesca, sadly; “ do you not know that he died a few months after our arrival in England?”

She started from her seat in dismay at the violent effects which her words produced. Marie

sprang to her feet, the hair streamed back from her forehead, the dew stood upon her temples, the eyes dilated with a wild unnatural glare, while every tinge of colour perished on lip and cheek. Some inarticulate words died upon her tongue, and the next moment she sank insensible at Francesca's side.

It was long before the united efforts of her attendants could rouse her from that stony trance; and when at length she opened her eyes, their expression was wandering, and her words unconnected. In despair, the leech was summoned; and, saying something about excited nerves and over-fatigue, he administered a sleeping draught; and Francesca never left the Comtesse till she saw her sunk in a profound slumber.

“Strange,” thought she, “how love and ambition have struggled for empire in that divided heart! How this passion of sorrow would have soothed Guido, could he have believed how keenly his loss would be felt! The love which was restrained for the living defies control when aroused for the dead.”

CHAPTER XXII.

“ ’Tis not alone
The human being’s pride that peoples space
With pride and mystical predominance.”

COLERIDGE.

It was early the next morning when Francesca was awakened by the curtains of her bed being put aside, and the red light of morning fell on the pale countenance of Madame de Soissons.

“ Francesca, dearest!” said she, in a hollow and constrained voice, “ I have a favour to implore. Lead me to Guido’s grave: my soul cannot rest in peace till I have knelt and prayed beside it.”

“ Marie,” exclaimed Francesca, gradually recalling the events of the preceding evening, “ you are in no fit state to meet more agitation. Some other time.”

“ Now, now!” interrupted the Comtesse impatiently. “ All is quiet in the Castle. I entreat you to accompany me. I know how strange you must think my conduct; but there—there I will tell you all.”

Francesca made no further opposition ; and conducting Marie down a small winding staircase, which led to the garden, they soon found themselves in the open air. They had to traverse a portion of the park, after which they entered the forest, on whose branches the hawthorn blossom was just beginning to break, while the first pale gold was peeping forth on the fern. At the rapid and excited pace with which Marie walked, they soon arrived at the churchyard.

“ There ! ” whispered Francesca, pointing to the lowly mound which sheltered the last sleep of the once impassioned and now quiet tenant.

Marie spoke not, but throwing herself on the ground, bowed her head upon the wild flowers. But though her face was hidden, not so were the convulsive sobs which shook her whole frame.

For a time Francesca turned away and wept ; all her own sorrow came back fresh upon her heart as she thought how sweet during life would have been that affection so vain and so violent after death !

Marie’s tears ceased at length from absolute exhaustion ; and allowing Francesca to raise her from the earth, they sat down together beside the grave.

“ Do you think he has forgiven me ? ” said

the Comtesse, suddenly: "methinks all looks so calm and so lovely, that earth has no wrong that might not here be forgotten." And she almost spoke truth; for beautiful was the mingled repose and animation of the scene.

It was yet very early, and the crimson flush of daybreak still lingered in some of the floating clouds. A silvery haze veiled the more distant landscape—melting, however, fast before the sunbeams, which were filled with that clear yet gentle light which belongs only to the first few hours of day. Deep yet soft shadows fell from every tree; but the sun shone full on the old church, turning the narrow panes of its glittering windows into molten and wavy gold; and kindling the clustering ivy, till every broad and smooth leaf was a mirror silvered with the dew. The air was musical with the singing of innumerable birds, the fragrance of the first violets came upon the wind, and the last primroses spread their pale beauty over Guido's tomb.

"It was on the third day of —— that Guido died," said Marie.

"How ever do you know so accurately?" exclaimed Francesca, astonished; "I thought you said last night you were till then unacquainted with my bitter, my heavy loss?"

“ I knew not of his death till I came to England ; but now I,—but you will mock me—yet surely not here. I will tell you all. That night I saw Guido as distinctly as I see you—you, in this open daylight, and before blessed heaven. I was alone, when I saw his sad and reproachful eyes, his pale and beautiful countenance, grow as it were on the air. A strange horror came over me, and I fainted ; but the recollection is as actual as any other circumstance of my existence. Shall I tell you the truth ? The first awe passed away—I firmly believed that, by some inscrutable means, he had gained access, and deemed it best to preserve strict silence on the subject ; but now I know it was no living form that passed before me !” And again Marie hid her face in her hands, while Francesca was too oppressed to speak : she remembered the terror that had been upon her previous to Guido’s death.

“ We will not talk of it,” she whispered, in a faint voice ; “ there are mysteries on which it is not good to dwell. I feel deep within my inmost heart, that now his rest is dreamless and unbroken.”

For a little while longer they sat in silence, when suddenly the Comtesse, whose burst of passionate agony had subsided into almost unconscious

weeping, snatched up a handful of the wild flowers on the grave—they were wet with her tears.

“What a weak, inconsistent fool am I! The sun in a few hours will dry all traces of this heart-wrung moisture from the glistening leaves; and so will the glare of my busier life efface the traces of this emotion from my own memory—at least, if remembered during an occasional sad and lonely hour, I shall not be the less immersed in the pleasures, the interests, the thousand small hopes and fears of the day.”

“It avails little,” answered Francesca, “to dwell upon the past.”

“You are right,” interrupted Marie; “the present is every thing.”

“Nay,” returned the other, “I meant not to make so sweeping an assertion.”

“But I did,” continued Madame de Soissons. “Of the past, to be very candid, I am a little ashamed. The future is but a chance; but the present—let me be amused, flattered, successful in ninety-nine out of my hundred projects—(I need an occasional stimulus)—and I shall get through life as pleasantly, or rather more so, than most persons. Let us forget this morning. I was wrong in yielding to an impulse, which is quite contrary to my system. It is a great mistake, cultivating

what are called feelings. Encourage your vanities, your follies, your wishes, and you lay up perpetual sources of delight in their gratification. But feeling! why cherish the serpent that will sting, and the fire that will consume—dreaming of a return which is never made, and of some impossible happiness which never comes?"

"And yet," replied Francesca, "there is that in the deep or the lofty feeling that redeems itself. I cannot waste the precious thoughts of my solitude on objects which are utterly unworthy—the petty triumph or the transient amusement."

"Oh!" cried the Comtesse, laughing, "I cry you mercy, if you come to the romantic imaginings of which solitude is the inexhaustible mother. I know that my own is the very worst company I can be in, and I therefore fly from it as much as possible."

"We shall never agree," replied Francesca. "The life in which you are involved would weary me to death."

"Nevertheless," exclaimed Madame de Soissons, "you must bear it for the next week, during which we intend to trespass on your hospitality. There will be time enough for your king to have his head turned by my pretty sister, and for you to develop the incipient inclination of De

Joinville, who will find his former admiration of the beautiful Italian greatly revived by discovering her to be the heiress of 'a certain fair castle.' Her Grace and Lord Craven will offer and accept *les hommages*, like the stately lovers of the good old days; and I—why, where there are human beings I can never lack entertainment. But let us return home. I have taken up too much of my hostess's time; and the toilette is one of those imperative duties whose neglect few circumstances can extenuate, and none justify."

She passed her arm through her friend's, and led her from the churchyard. As the little gate swung after them, she started and looked back. For the last time, she caught sight of Guido's grave. She turned hastily away, and walked rapidly down the path which led to the forest; but she walked in silence; and though her face was averted, Francesca could occasionally see the tears glistening as the sunshine touched her cheek.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ The royal marriage has engrossed all tongues.”

BEFORE they met next morning, the Chevalier de Joinville had learned as much of Francesca's history as was known in the Castle. It is wonderful what a talent some people have for extracting information, and combining it when extracted—how one fact is made to elucidate another, and the conclusion inferred from evidence fine as the spider's thread! It is a pity that this genius should be wasted on the events of ordinary life. Half the ingenuity lavished on news—by news we mean the topics of the day as connected with their own circle—half this ingenuity would set up a whole Society of Antiquaries, and immortalise at least a dozen of them.

The Chevalier possessed in its perfection that happy art which illuminates the known by the imaginative, and in such light discovers the actual.

Having satisfied his curiosity, he had only another desire to gratify, viz. that of communication. Just now his sphere was somewhat limited; for, from their terms of familiarity, he might infer that Madame de Soissons knew all he could tell—and the fair Hortense was *préoccupée et distraite*. Lord Craven was engaged with the Queen; and to Francesca herself, he had too much tact not to know, that beyond a brief congratulation, the less he said the better. However, he promised himself ample *dédommagement*, when he returned to Paris; and in the mean time he shared the usual lot of mortals—that is, he lived on expectation. Ah! what would life be without its perspective. Still he had a little present enjoyment—how much he had to tell of all that had occurred in France during Francesca's absence!

After a long and magnificent breakfast, the Queen—well aware that, next to themselves and their own merits, people are most alive to those observed in their houses and lands—proposed to Lord Avonleigh that he should shew them his superb palace; and a happy man was he while doing the honours of old tapestries, carved cornices, and portraits in mail armour, or silks nearly as stiff.

At length the beautiful morning tempted the

whole party into the open air; and, while walking up and down the terrace, the Chevalier easily contrived to engross Francesca's ear. After a few compliments and acknowledgments, the conversation naturally reverted to Paris; and Francesca soon found that she was as ready to make inquiries as De Joinville was ready to answer them.

“In good truth,” replied he to some question, “one single subject has engaged all our attention—we have asked, we have heard, we have dreamed of nothing but his Majesty's marriage. The Cardinal declared, that the alliance having given peace to France, he should die content—the Queen Mother, that the hope of her life having been realised, she could die content too. I began to be alarmed lest the whole world, fancying it could never find a finer opportunity, might also come to an end in

‘One last great act—the winding-up of fate.’

However, the consequences have not been quite so desperate—no one died after all.”

“But the young Queen,” asked Francesca—“what is she like?”

“Why she is one of those persons whom negatives seem invented to describe—I doubt whether she is worth one single bad quality.”

“Surely,” said she, smiling, “that is a deficiency which may readily be pardoned.”

“No such thing!” exclaimed he; “we need bad qualities to set off our good ones. A few faults are indispensable in those with whom we are to live—they are needed to excuse our own. This sort of dull perfection is a perpetual reproach to ourselves; besides, light cannot exist without shadow. Choose what fault you please; but, for pity’s sake, have one, if you ever mean to be liked or loved.”

“Still you have not told me if your new Queen be handsome.”

“Ah! I should have known that a lady’s is always a personal question. Well, then, she is pretty, but it is the mere prettiness of youth—a radiant complexion, and long bright hair. I thought her handsomer the first time I saw her in Spain than I have ever thought her since—a sure sign that she is not beautiful, for nothing grows upon you more than beauty.”

“You have been in Spain, then, since we last met?”

“Yes; I accompanied the embassy sent to negotiate this very marriage. Such an ambassador for a love affair as the Bishop of Fréjus! The King had given him a letter for the Infanta,

which, however, the strict etiquette of the Spanish court forbade her receiving. However, with a Christian charity worthy of commendation, he resolved that he would give her the epistle. Accordingly, on his first interview, he watched his opportunity, and said, while he held the scroll in his hand, ‘Madam, I have a secret to tell you.’ Now the very word secret is enough to rouse any one’s curiosity; and, giving a quick glance round to see if her duennas were on the alert, she prepared to listen, and I saw that her eye had caught sight of the letter. Our excellent Bishop continued: ‘Alas, my master is not so happy as he believed, for your father will not allow you to receive this epistle, which I yet venture to offer.’ Can you imagine aught so stupid as this—suggesting the idea of her father’s anger at the very time when his object was to make her forget that there was such a thing as a father in the world? What could he expect but the answer he received—‘I cannot take it without permission of the King, my father?’ ‘And will you not say one word to his Highness?’ asked Fréjus. ‘What I say to the Queen, my aunt, may also be understood by the King, her son.’ Now, if this was not encouragement, I do not know what is; and yet our stupid envoy went away with the letter still in his possession.”

“ I do not see how he could help it,” said Francesca.

“ Help it! why, he might have dropped it at her feet, and trusted to her ingenuity for its concealment. Believe me, it is the greatest mistake ever to ask a consent in such cases. Pray, allow the fair lady the decent excuse of ‘ But how could I help it?’ ”

“ Very considerate, indeed,” answered his companion, laughing.

“ Nothing could be more splendid than the marriage; but as such details are only interesting when they are personal, I shall spare you all the cloth of gold, the embroidery, and the precious stones, displayed on the occasion, and merely tell you a pretty comparison made by the young queen. When her wedding presents, feathers, ribands, flowers, precious stuffs, &c. &c. were carried past the Escorial windows, she said, “ that they put her in mind of a moving parterre.”

“ How did Mademoiselle,” asked Francesca, who remembered all the histories *de la ligne* which were uppermost in every one’s mind when she arrived in Paris, “ endure the royal marriage, and see that crown on the brow of another which she had so long hoped for to encircle her own?”

“ Oh, exceedingly well—with that best of

philosophy born of *les amusemens et les distractions*. She made a journey *incognita* to Spain, and was so full of her own wonderful courage in venturing across the water in a high wind—of contempt for the dress of the Spanish women—and, finally, so intent on the etiquettes of train-bearing, and calling the Princess Palatine ‘*ma cousine,*’ that the greater interest was lost in a succession of minor concerns. And now, I believe, little that is important remains to be told, excepting that for a whole day the discourse of the court turned on nothing but the King of Spain’s meanness. The Queen Mother sent him a magnificent clock, where time sparkled as it passed—for it was literally covered with diamonds; and the only return made was a present of some Spanish gloves. I hear that Anne herself in private avowed her extreme mortification.”

“ And now that we have discussed the past,” said Francesca, “ what do you say of the present ?”

“ Why, that Mazarin will see no niece of his on the throne of England.”

“ To promote which design is the object of this visit.”

“ And, like many other grand designs, will be discomfited by a very slight obstacle. Not to

offend your loyalty, a pretty face, so well set (diamonds themselves require to be mounted in gold), might have its weight with your monarch, if report speak truth; but every one of the Mancinis have a will of their own, and la belle Hortense will not belie her race. Every age has its extravagances, and love belongs to her time of life. A certain Count de Meilleraye has already obtained a hint of our destination; he left Paris before us, and, profiting by his acquaintance with the Duke of Buckingham, will accompany him—and at sixteen ‘*l’amant vaut bien le Roi.*’”

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed Francesca, “how many cross purposes there are in this intricate game of human life! We only mock ourselves by laying down plans for the future—at least if those plans embrace others.”

“Whence I draw the conclusion,” replied De Joinville, “that we ought to lay none, saving for ourselves. It is an old error, but one fruitful in human disappointment, that we will offer our services to Providence, and arrange the destinies of all our relations and half our acquaintances.”

“Still, no one can deny that the Cardinal has been a kind and affectionate relative. His nieces, at least, have cause to be grateful.”

“And of course, as they ought to be, they are

not. We receive great obligations as if they were our due, and are thankless as much out of vanity as ingratitude.

“ We will drop this subject, if you please,” interrupted Francesca; “ they are old friends of mine, and I at least do not wish to hear of faults I have no power to amend.”

The Chevalier paused, and for a few minutes they pursued their walk in silence; but De Joinville soon hit on another topic. “ I saw an old—friend I can scarcely say, in Paris lately—Mr. Evelyn.” Francesca turned pale, and involuntarily leant against the balustrade; with an effort she muttered a faint “ Indeed!” and the Chevalier, concealing his surprise at her extreme emotion, added, “ but so thin, and so altered, that I think even you would forgive him could you see him.”

“ You are great friends,” replied Francesca, scarcely knowing what she said.

“ We were,” replied the Chevalier; “ but this time, when we met by accident in the Boulevards, he very quietly looked at me without a symptom of recognition, and, when I spoke, civilly told me ‘ that he could not recollect ever having seen me before.’ Of course I took the hint. I saw him once since, as he was leaving the presence of Cardinal Mazarin, and he again passed me in silence.

He goes into no society, participates in no amusement, and, verily, seems to be performing as much penance as even your displeasure could justify."

The Chevalier was evidently confounding the two brothers, but it could now only be Robert of whom he was speaking. To undeceive him appeared both impossible and unnecessary—at least at present—for a thousand improbable schemes of communication with Evelyn, through his means, flashed across Francesca's mind, though only to be instantly dismissed. To pursue the conversation, however, on indifferent subjects was now unbearable; her thoughts wandered, and if she still heard the sound of De Joinville's voice, the sense of his words was lost upon the air. With much good-nature he allowed their discourse, or rather his own, to drop gradually into silence, and employed himself in wondering if she still loved Evelyn, that his name could thus move her; "and if so," thought he, "I shall believe in disinterested attachment lasting upon nothing."

But Francesca was not permitted the luxury of solitude and reflection; vain was the attempt to seek her own chamber, and indulge in one quiet half hour, for at that very moment three cavaliers rode up the avenue. Lord Avonleigh, first summoning all his household, hurried to receive them.

Francesca noted that the cheek of Hortense brightened, while the brow of her sister darkened, as they recognised in one of them the Count de Meilleraye. All individual emotions passed unnoticed in the general enthusiasm with which the King—for it was he—was received as he entered, leaning on the arm of the Duke of Buckingham.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“ We make ourselves the path wherein we tread.”

“ WELL, all we can do is to amuse ourselves,” exclaimed the Comtesse de Soissons, as she leant back in the large arm-chair in her dressing-room that night. “ All my uncle’s fine matrimonial projects are vanished into thin air. I see that his Britannic Majesty will not marry Hortense—I see that Hortense will marry Meilleraye. Business before pleasure, I am ready to grant; but when there is none, *il faut s’amuser*.”

“ We will do our best,” replied Francesca; “ but I fear, to use a national proverb, you must take the will for the deed.”

“ I shall take no such thing,” returned Marie; “ for here the will and the deed rest with myself, and I am one with whom they always go together.”

“ You are fortunate.”

“ Rather say resolved—*je veux* is life’s passport.”

“ You must not judge of others by yourself; you will surely allow that your own lot in life has been a golden one.”

“ It is of my own gilding, then. My first design was magnificent, and spoke genius; but it was rashly conceived and rashly executed. Of course it was unsuccessful; but it was not without profit. Your proverb I will answer with another: ‘ He who aims at being Pope will die Cardinal at least.’ I lost the heart of Louis, but I gained the hand of the Comte de Soissons; and a prince of the blood royal, rich and manageable, was no bad beginning for *la petite Italienne*. Marriage in real life is the very reverse of what it is in romances; we begin where they finish. I felt that a brilliant marriage was but the very commencement of my career. To assist my friends (because, if they hope nothing from you, what have you to hope from them?)—to injure my enemies, for fear is the best preventive—to make a failure useful, if only in its experience, have been my rules. I can recommend them by that best test, success. Shew me any one at our court who possesses my influence. The Queen Mother detests; but she dreads me—my uncle is indifferent, but finds me of use—our new

Queen is already a nonentity—and Louis knows that my house is the most agreeable in Paris.”

“No one,” said Francesca—for good wishes are as useful as any other form of speech when you do not know very well what to say, and her’s at least had the merit of being sincere,—“can wish you more success, or more happiness in your success, than I do.”

“I believe you,” returned the Comtesse, “which is what I would say to few. But really, dear Francesca, I must protest against your extreme sincerity.”

“It is my nature,” answered the other, with a smile.

“And pray, for what was our nature given us but to change and to control it? I pay truth a much higher compliment than you do—I hold it too precious to be pressed into the service of every common occasion.”

“But I have not your talents,” replied Francesca, well aware that argument, when only to be met by ridicule, is fruitless.

“I admire your modesty; but this quality, like the one we were just speaking of, is only useful to ornament our discourse. It is perfectly judicious to profess both. Let us say how modest and how candid we are—let us even lament over

an excess in these particulars—let us avow that we often find them in our way—but let us not practise them. People judge us much more by what we say than by what we do. We are taken upon our word.”

“ Whence I infer that we ought to be very careful of what we say.”

“ For once we agree—words alike make the destiny of empires and of individuals. Ambition, love, hate, interest, vanity, have words for their engines, and need none more powerful. Language is a fifth element—the one by which all the others are swayed. The king addresses his people, and the heaviest impost is levied with acclamations—the general harangues his troops, and thousands rush upon the smoking cannon and the gleaming bayonets—the lover whispers his mistress, and she forgets even herself for his sake. A word will part friends, and for ever—a word floats down the stream of time when all else has perished; in short, how do we persuade, invent, create, and live, but by words?—they are at once our subjects and our masters. Judicious those who devote at least half their life to their study.”

“ After all, they are but the outward signs.”

“ And is not the outside every thing in this world?” interrupted Madame de Soissons. “ Why,

we might take a lesson from the very earth on which we tread. All that is valuable and delightful lies upon its surface.”

“ You forget ‘ silver and gold, and heaps of shining stones.’ ”

“ For which miserable wretches dig into its depths, and bring thence for the more fortunate. We might take a lesson from them. Let us penetrate beyond the green and flowery crust, and what do we find?—danger and darkness—that some precious things may be brought up, I grant you, but the seekers perish. I own I have not the interest of others sufficiently at heart to run any such risks. And now let me apply this image to human life. I am well content to take the courtesies, flatteries—falsehoods, if you will—which grow on the external of society. I wish not to dive into the depths of envy, hatred, and malice, that lie below. I never examine but in self-defence.”

“ I could not,” replied Francesca, “ be contented with a friend whose thoughts were concealed from me, or with a lover whose feelings I did not at least believe were all laid open to my knowledge.”

“ But I do not go about the world with such improbable expectations of love and friendship as you do. I expect from my lover, first, flattery ;

secondly, falsehood. I know I am very charming, but nothing in this world lasts—not even my fascination. In a little while, my dark eyes, my pretty hands, and my white teeth, will become too well known for admiration. We actually do not see what we see often. After a time, he will have heard every thing witty I have to say: a repeated epigram is like a broken needle, and has no second point. We shall have exhausted the absurdities of our friends—I shall no longer talk with animation—he will no longer listen with delight—both will feel the necessity of change—and my only object will be to change the first. As to friends, so long as we have mutual interests, our friendship is made for eternity; but let them come in contact, and we have nothing left but wonder how it ever existed.”

“ I thank you for the name of friend, which you bestow upon me,” said Francesca.

“ Why, my addressing these remarks to you is the greatest possible compliment. You are in duty bound to suppose they do not include you. The stronger the rule, the more flattering the exception; and the truth is, Francesca, I do indeed make you an exception. I think better of you than I do of myself—and that, too, without hating you. My liking for you is grounded on divers reasons—

all so good that one alone would be cause sufficient. First, our friendship began at that early time when alone it is unalloyed and sincere; secondly"—and here, in spite of her vivacity, Marie's voice trembled—"you are associated with the only being in the world I ever really loved; and thirdly, I have behaved exceedingly ill to you, and, consequently, feel it quite magnanimous not to hate you, which is the established rule on such occasions."

"Pray, continue your magnanimity."

"It is my full intention; and as friends make a point of being as disagreeable as possible, I shall at once begin with that last extremity—giving advice. Now, tell me, Francesca, what use do you intend making of the many advantages which surround you at this moment?"

"I see no advantages. Ah! Marie, you are little aware of my many drawbacks. My father, though he has avowed me, has no affection for a child whose very existence he knew not for many years."

"And of what earthly consequence is it whether he love you or not? You are not the less his acknowledged and only child, heiress of this noble domain, very beautiful, and, if well managed, with half England at your feet."

“ I am sure I should not know what to do with a quarter.”

“ I believe you ; but do try and learn. It is obvious that the Duke of Buckingham is come down with a full intention of laying siege to *la belle héritière*.”

“ It is a matter of perfect indifference to me.”

The Comtesse gazed at her earnestly for a moment, and Francesca coloured deeply. Quite misinterpreting the blush, she went on eagerly. “ I really have some hopes of you. While your king is unmarried, you do quite right to look at nothing under royalty. Charles is not mother and minister-ridden, like Louis. I remarked how much he was struck by your appearance. I entreat your future majesty to remember, that I now predict the success of an attempt.”

“ Which will never be made,” exclaimed Francesca. “ There is nothing more absurd than refusing what never will be offered ; but I would not marry Charles Stuart if he had the crown of the world, instead of England’s, at his disposal.”

“ And why not ? unless you are planet-struck by the Duke of Buckingham. Never, my dear, allow your fancy to interfere with your interest.”

“ So little notice did I take of the Duke, that I should not know him again.”

Madame de Soissons leant back in her chair thoughtfully. "She knows England better than I do. Perhaps these *demi-savages* may stand upon their dignity as much as Louis himself; and the coronet is what the crown is not—attainable." Then pursuing the thread of her thoughts, she said aloud, "But, Francesca, you will surely accept his Grace? What can you hope for more?"

"Much, much more—a heart for which my own will be given in exchange. I would not marry the man I did not love for all the wealth of the east, and for the united honours of France and England."

"Love!" ejaculated the Comtesse; "and so throw away the chances of a life upon a month of honey!—I say a month, which is allowing a latitude tenderness never took. Love! why that is cheating yourself into marriage, as they cheat the children—a little sugar at first, to conceal the nauseous draught which follows. You will find that, at the very best, marriage is a state which requires all sorts of resources to make it even endurable; but to marry for love aggravates the evil—it adds contrast to its other disappointments. Far better to make up your mind to the worst, and say at once, I know that weariness is the

regular matrimonial feeling; but that may be alleviated by a splendid house, magnificent fêtes—by influence in society, jewels, laces, a lap-dog, and half-a-dozen lovers.”

“ I will be content with one,” replied Francesca.

“ Don't marry him, then. Marrying for love is like putting from shore to dwell in the morning palace the fay Morgana builds at daybreak on the coast of Naples. Fair and far the glistening halls extend, and the shining gardens seem filled with fruit and flowers; but the wind gets up, the glittering pinnacles melt into the cloudy sky, the haunted terraces vanish, and the golden chimera, born of sunshine and vapour, is no more. Suddenly you find yourself in a little wretched boat, rocked by the waves into sea-sickness, scorched by the hot noon, tossed about by a rough breeze, and left to weep or curse your fate as may best suit your peculiar disposition.”

“ But you say nothing about your companion in the boat?”

“ Because I look upon him as a nonentity. But though I have your interest at heart, I have also my own complexion: we may dream of conquests to-night, but we shall not make them to-morrow, if ‘ we look pale and weary with long watching,’—so adieu!”

Francesca took the hint and her taper, not sorry to retire; for she found her resolution inadequate to ask the question which hovered on her lips, whether Marie had seen Mr. Evelyn in Paris. No sooner had she reached her apartment, than she began to reproach her own indecision. Ah! no questions are so difficult to ask as those which the heart deeply and dearly treasures! When alone, we shape them into a thousand forms—imagine every possible occasion for asking them—say them over to ourselves, as if there were a charm in the sound; but the time comes, and they die unheard upon the lip,—we have not resolution to ask them.

CHAPTER XXV.

“ A man so various, that he seemed to be
No man himself, but man’s epitome.”

DRYDEN.

“ So I hear that his Majesty has granted you the manors of Evelyn,” said Lord Avonleigh to the Duke of Buckingham. “ Our hunting is very good ; and I trust we shall have you for something more than a temporary neighbour.”

“ I only hope that you will not see too much of me. Human nature never yet resisted temptation. Sylvan shades that boast such a Diana have attractions which might tempt us to realise the visions of ‘ Old Arcady,’ ” replied the other, turning to Francesca, whose eyes were fixed on the ground, and whose cheek was suffused with the deepest carnation.

With the vanity of a man whose conquests had lacked one only charm—difficulty, he immediately applied the blush to himself ; but Madame de Sois-

sons, who, in spite of the lively dialogue which she was carrying on with the King, observed a favourite rule, which was, to allow nothing to escape her notice, marked Francesca's change of countenance also—from its first deadly paleness to its crimson confusion; and her inference was quite opposite to that of the Duke. He, however, was stimulated to complete a conquest so happily commenced: first, because he considered love as a proper compliment, which all women owed him; secondly, because Francesca was a beauty; and, thirdly, an heiress,—the last motive being the most powerful; for, as the worthy biographer of Sir John Parrot justly observes, “nothing doth more stimulate men to action than desire of gain.” Holding imitation to be the most delicate of flattery, the Duke usually made it a point of conscience to adopt the tastes of the fair dame to whom, for the time, he devoted himself. “Self-love,” as he was wont to observe, “was thus enlisted on his side of the question—she preferred herself in him.”

In a moment Francesca recovered herself, and, joining as carelessly as she could in the conversation, said, “As far as my experience has gone, I infinitely prefer the country to the town. There is something to me at once desolate, and yet confined, in a city. The multitude of faces

continually passing and repassing, all strangers, overwhelm you with a sense of your own nothingness. The brick walls are so dreary, the streets so dirty—all the associations belonging to whatever is most common-place in our existence—that whenever I gaze from the window, I always feel lowered and dispirited. But, in the country, the green fields are so joyous, the pure air so fresh, the blue sky so clear; the fine old trees, redolent of earth's loveliest mythology, when the dryades peopled their green shadows; the fair flowers, at the unfolding of whose leaves some line of delicious poetry springs to mind; the singing of the wind, like a natural lute, plaining amid the leaves,—all combine to carry me out of myself. I feel a thousand vague and sweet emotions, and am both better and happier. Yes, I do love the country."

"Well," exclaimed Madame de Soissons, "the fate of our sex and of the country seems to be much the same: we are doomed to have a thousand fine things said of us which nobody means or ever acts upon. Your philosopher talks of the virtue only to be found in rural life, and remains quietly in his arm-chair and his town lodgings: your lover raves of your cruelty, which he vows he cannot survive, leaves your presence, and orders

a good supper. Considering how much we say that we do not mean, how fortunate it is that we are not taken at our word! We should then be cautious how we talked of rustic and innocent pleasures, of dying for love, and eternal constancy."

"We deceive ourselves on most subjects," said the Duke; "but I own, especially when I am out of humour, that a vision of some calm retreat, far 'from the busy hum of men,' is apt to rise upon my imagination,—all my poetry takes refuge 'in lonely glade or haunted dell.' I could not love a woman whose image was for ever accompanied in my memory by brick and mortar."

"All our poetical feelings," replied Francesca, "delight to link themselves with natural objects. The leaf, the flower, the star, the dew, are the inexhaustible sources of imagery."

"And one feeling, loveliest of all, delights in such connexion. The poet bears love with him to his own haunted solitude."

"Ah!" exclaimed Francesca, "all the finer mysteries of the spirit vanish in the crowd. Vanity is to the many the stimulus that affection is to the few."

"Yes," answered Buckingham, in a tone of voice so low that it was all but a whisper, "there is nothing so heartless as that hurrying

intercourse—careless, and yet constrained—which constitutes society. I can imagine—nay, fancy I was meant for an existence so different—an existence where all the deeper feelings would not be wholly wasted, as they are now. But I need the wand of the enchanter to lead me through the weary maze in which habit and indifference soon entangles one hitherto without a dearer aim. Just now,” for he perceived Francesca was meditating a retreat—a design which he set down to embarrassment, “my head is full of some exquisite lines I was reading this morning in your library. I hear, Lady Francesca, that it is a favourite room of yours. Do pray join with me in admiring the picturesque tenderness with which the poet invests his dream of futurity.” So saying, in a voice low and sweet as just-heard music, he repeated the following lines:—

——— “ I disdain

All pomp when thou art by : far be the noise
Of kings, and courts, from us, whose gentle souls
Our kinder stars have steered another way.
Free as the forest-birds we'll pair together—
Fly to the arbours, grotts, and flowery meads,
And in soft murmurs interchange our souls ;
Together drink the crystal of the stream,
Or taste the yellow fruit which autumn yields ;
And, when the golden evening calls us home,
Wing to our downy nest, and sleep till morn.”

“What a feeling of security,” continued he, “is flung round the uncertainty of love, by the calm and gentle images with which it is here invested!—”

But their disquisition was interrupted by Lord Avonleigh, who came to announce that a deputation from Southampton waited without, full of eloquence and loyalty. From the reluctance with which the monarch rose from Madame de Soissons' side, this was evidently not half so attractive as the Parisian anecdotes, whose *malice* lost nothing in her hands. However, all hastened to the hall, and one half the day was spent in receiving the congratulations of the worthy mayor, and the remainder in ridiculing them.

The Duke of Buckingham, in an old wig which he borrowed from the steward, and his worship's actual red cloak, which had been purloined by his orders, the owner having lost all distinctions—even those of property, to which he was, generally speaking, keenly alive—in the canary which he had drained to the health of his most gracious Majesty;—in this said wig and cloak his Grace gave a most faithful representation of the pompous little magistrate, to the great amusement of the company, who had now no decorum to restrain their mirth. Lord Avon-

leigh's laugh might, perhaps, be rather forced ; for, to be candid in our confessions, the deputation had been arranged by himself, and the very speech which the Duke of Buckingham had just mouthed with equal powers of memory and mimicry, had been the joint production of himself and the mayor, the latter having only learnt by heart what the former had concocted. However, as the King laughed, it was his duty, as a loyal subject, to laugh too ; and as for his Grace of Buckingham—intending him, as he did, for his son-in-law—he was for the present privileged. All depends upon circumstance—anger as much as any thing else. Interest is your only true cosmetic for smoothing the brow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ Old friendships, which renew the days of youth.”

THE old friendship between Marie and Francesca had returned with something of the warmth and confidence of its earlier time. As usual, the motives which led to its renewal were of a very mixed nature. At once affectionate and reserved, Francesca's temper needed an object to love, but she was too shy to make the first advances; hence an old attachment, made easy by the freedom of childhood, and unrestrained through long habit, had upon her a more than ordinary hold. She had also been so long debarred from any interchange of feelings and sentiments—so surrounded by strangers, that it was a true enjoyment to meet with one, who, if she did not enter into many of the emotions connected with it, was yet able and ready to talk of the past. Moreover, to a generous nature like her own, the very fact of

having much to forgive rather endeared Marie than not; and in immediate circumstances there was nothing to call forth the worst parts of her character.

Madame de Soissons' return to her girlish friendship was modified by many more worldly reasons. She was unconsciously influenced by the changed circumstances in which she found Francesca. Accustomed to regard rank and wealth as the gods of this lower world, it was impossible not to pay them homage wherever she found them. She also really loved our heroine as much as it was in her nature to love any one. The gloss of novelty was still fresh upon their intimacy; both had much to tell and hear; their past was in common, and they did not interfere in the slightest degree at present. There was also one mutual feeling which they had, like their whole sex—confidence is a feminine necessity. There are very few women but who like each other's society, and of this liking sympathy is the grand secret: none but themselves can fully enter into their hopes, fears, and plans; all of which are nothing without being discussed. A woman only can understand a woman; and it is pleasant to be understood sometimes.

Within the last day or two, Madame de Sois-

sons' interest in Francesca had received a new impetus. A brain so fertile as her own in projects could not long be without one. The Duke of Buckingham had been the means of overthrowing a scheme of her's,—she would try if it would not be possible to overthrow one of his. “Diamonds and hearts,” exclaimed she,—“the same game over again. I have lost the first game, but I shall have my revenge.” That very day Madame de Soissons had learned from Henriette, that all hope of an alliance between her son and Hortense was hopeless. “Her predilection,” said the Queen, “for the Comte de Mielleraye is so marked.”

The Comtesse, in her heart, execrated the blind folly of her sister, but still more the subtle policy of the adversary which had thrown the early lover in the way of ambition. Perhaps it would have given her little pleasure to have seen Hortense so far elevated above herself; but envy was now *hors de combat*, and, except vengeance, nothing remained to console a disappointment rendered more bitter by defeat. She knew, however, from whose hand the arrow came, and she resolved on returning it. The truth was, that the Duke of Buckingham had a better memory for the sleights of the French court than his indolent master; and when he heard of the proposed visit,

resolved to do all he could to frustrate its design. He forthwith sent the Comte de Mielleraie due warning of the project, asked him to England, and offered to introduce him to Avonleigh Castle. It may readily be supposed that the Comte accepted the proposal, left Paris, and his appearance at so critical a moment turned in his favour whatever might have wavered of Hortense's heart.

Charles was too good-natured to interfere with an inclination which did not interfere with his own; and left the weight of explanation to his mother or Buckingham, who was eloquent about the expectations of the people of England, and the necessity for a royal alliance; while his master was perfectly content, as long as the visit lasted, to permit himself to be amused by Madame de Soissons.

Buckingham, in the meantime, was not without a scheme for his own advantage. He was attracted by Francesca's beauty, but still more by her being the rich Lord Avonleigh's only child. He had already received a grant of the Evelyn estate, and the two united would form the finest property in England. Already he meditated obtaining possession of the whole county of Hampshire; for he was as avaricious in acquisition as he was lavish in expenditure. The gallantry

which then prevailed, and made the language of love so universal as almost to divest it of meaning, allowed him to try his acknowledged powers of fascination on Francesca without committing himself; who, her heart wholly occupied with the image of another,

“ Smiled, and then forgot
The gentle things to which she listened not.”

Not so Madame de Soissons, who at once divined his intentions and watched his progress, internally resolving to render him every ill office pique could suggest, or ridicule execute. Still, she feared him, for every thing was in his favour—rank, fortune, personal advantages; but, most of all, she dreaded himself. She noted that he had read Francesca's character truly, and sought to propitiate her favour by the refined sentiment, and an under-current of exalted and poetic feeling, which shewed to great advantage, veiled, not hidden, by his lively and graceful manner. But Francesca's sudden paleness and deep blush at the name of Evelyn threw a new light upon the subject. Marie at once recollected the young and handsome Englishman who had occupied so large a portion of their attention in Italy. She remembered vaguely some history of a quarrel, she could scarcely recollect what, between him and Francesca;

and she also recalled having seen him lately in Paris so altered as to attract her attention, though only for the moment. Would it be possible to effect a reconciliation? At all events, she resolved to introduce the subject.

Little did she know how ever present it was to Francesca's thoughts, still less the many difficulties which it involved; the difficulties, however, would have been an attraction:—the genius for intrigue needs a few obstacles to stimulate its powers.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“ But this divinest universe
Was yet a chaos and a cave.”

SHELLEY.

“ I REALLY congratulate you on your brilliant conquest,” said Madame de Soissons, as she was seated in the usual *tête-à-tête* with her hostess which concluded the day. “ Are you not afraid of the consequences of the despair of your five hundred rivals? As a friend, I advise you, after you are Duchess of Buckingham, never to move out without a guard, and to drink but from a Venetian glass; thus taking all possible precautions against ‘ the poison or the steel.’ ”

“ When I am Duchess, I will take all the care you advise; but it is waste of time guarding against evils which never can arrive.”

“ Never! What will you wager that the first letter I receive from you in France does not contain a full account of all the preparations for your marriage at least, if not of the marriage itself?”

“ I will stake heart, life, and soul, on the impossibility.”

“ You speak earnestly,” replied the Comtesse. “ We all know the worth of a lady’s negative. The more forcible the resolution, the more chance there is of its being broken.”

“ Not with me. Under no possible circumstances could I love the Duke of Buckingham. He is too unreal—he affects too much to suit what he supposes is your taste. Life is to him a *scène de comédie*: he aims at acting his many parts brilliantly; but, in our admiration for the actor, we lose all interest in the individual.”

“ The truth is, or at least such I suspect it to be, that you have no heart, Francesca, to give. I remember a certain young English cavalier, whom we usually found loitering beside the ruined temple in the pine-wood. You had some lover’s quarrel; but you are disposed to Christian charity, are you not? Nay, nay—don’t blush, nor turn away that pretty head! I shall be a most indulgent confessor. What! tears, Francesca? You love him still?”

“ I do,” said Francesca, “ more dearly, more deeply than you can dream!” and again she hid her face in her hands. But this was one of those subjects on which, speak but once, give but one

little hint, and the heart forces its way to the lips, —it must have the relief of words.

“ I loved him when but a girl, when only alive to the intense happiness which he taught me could exist. I could have passed days, content but to look upon his face, to watch his shadow wave on the long and undulating grass; to hear his voice; and when he gazed on me—when he spoke, though in the most indifferent words—to feel my heart beat as if it had started into sudden existence, and yet could have died upon the moment—its every purpose of life fulfilled in that deep and unutterable delight. He loved me. I should have perished when his presence was no longer around me, had I not lived upon that sweet and secret knowledge. We met once more—he seemed changed; his unworthiness was forced upon me, and we parted—never, never to meet again! Humiliated, angry, resolved as I was, yet even then I loved him: all recent injury faded before the tender memory of our early love. At length I learned that we had both been cruelly deceived—that he was all I once believed him. Judge how my heart sprang back to its old allegiance, hopeless though it was—though it is! Marie, I tell you, that were every worldly advantage heaped in one balance, and his own exiled self placed in the other, I would rather follow him

a beggar through the world, live a neglected slave at his side, than take the fairest portion that Fortune ever yet assigned a favourite. Nay, more:—uncertain as I now am whether his affection may have survived my supposed faithlessness, I would rather preserve the poor privilege of treasuring up his remembrance—of carrying for his sake a wrung but undivided heart to the grave—than aught else that life can offer,—my first, my last, and only love! I cannot even imagine a destiny uncoloured by his influence, or a life undevoted to his idea.”

Both were silent. The language of strong passion or deep feeling was strange to Marie; she scarce knew how to answer it. For a moment she yielded to a confused sensation of tenderness and sympathy; but the worldly calculation soon arose. She now felt assured that the Duke would never succeed. Still, habit was all powerful, and she thought within herself, “*les absens ont toujours tort.*” Would not Evelyn’s presence be additional security? But how was that to be managed? She must know more. “Have you no means of communicating with Mr. Evelyn?” asked she.

“None,” replied Francesca; “never was situation more awkward or more painful than my own. But have you patience to hear the history?”

“ Not only patience, but inclination,” cried Marie, drawing her chair eagerly forward, and looking the curiosity she felt.

Thus encouraged, Francesca proceeded as briefly as possible to detail the events of the last two years, interrupted only by an occasional exclamation of surprise from her companion; and at last concluded by saying, “ And now, can any thing be more hopeless? An exile in all probability from his country for ever, what chance have I of meeting Robert Evelyn again? And even were we to meet, it would be in coldness on his part, which would be an insurmountable bar to explanation. Often and often do I feel so wretched, so despairing, that the quiet rest of the grave seems all that I dare desire, or can hope.”

“ Not quite so desperate, dearest Francesca. I never will believe but that Fate owes you a recompense. I will for once prophesy from my wishes, and predict a happy meeting between yourself and Mr. Evelyn.”

Francesca pressed her extended hand, but gave no further answer; and the friends separated for the night—one to think, the other to act. Madame de Soissons had just finished a packet to be despatched to her uncle. Late as was the hour, she sat down and wrote a long letter, which, when con-

cluded, she enclosed to the Cardinal. Apparently, she was satisfied with her performance, for a smile of triumph curled her lip as she sealed the scroll and whispered to herself, "The game, I think, is in my own hands. I would not give much for his Grace's chance of this fair castle and its fairer heir."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ Oh, man ! hold thee on in courage of soul,
Through the stormy shades of thy worldly way.”

SHELLEY.

It was a small and gloomy-looking apartment in one of the retired streets of Paris, where all was as quiet as if it had not been in the centre of that busy metropolis. Only a distant and incessant murmur, like the rolling of the sea against the resounding shore, told that life was pouring the perpetual tumult of its restless waves around. The contrast was oppressive, for the stillness of the place itself was that of inaction, not of repose. Like one excluded from the general struggle, not like one retired from it, a young cavalier was the sole tenant of that lonely chamber, and for the last half-hour he had sat in a desponding reverie, watching the blaze of his wood-fire gradually dying away on the hearth—his sole employment, meditating over a past whose every recollection

was a disappointment—and his sole solace, drawing fanciful similitudes between the faded embers and his own quenched hopes. “ So have they perished before me, one and all, the dreams in which I have indulged—the aims to which I aspired. Love—that which should have been the one sweet flower on my weary path—has indeed been to me the reed which pierced the heart that leant on it so confidingly. Since falsehood could wear such fair similitude of truth—since Francesca could deceive me—whom can I ever trust again? And, good God! to think that it was my own brother, from whom I had not kept back one thought—who knew how I prized the treasure of which he robbed me—that he should have turned away from me that affection I deemed so entirely my own! But, poor Francis! I must not think of him now with anger. Cut off in the pride of youth, he has dearly paid for all his faults and follies. But a few months more, and what a change would have awaited him! The Stuarts are now on the English throne—an event which must have realised all his hope of brilliant fortunes. Had he lived, my father’s house would not have passed into the hands of strangers. How vain are the schemes in which we all delight! Francis, ardent and courtly, devotes himself to that royal

cause which, when he has perished, becomes triumphant. I delude myself with vain aspirations for that liberty which the few secure to the many; and I see the servile shackles of old rights and prejudices more closely riveted than ever. Now, a future without hope that can elevate, or aim that can attach, is before me. A worthless mercenary in some foreign service, or an idle loiterer in stranger lands, is all that remains for a life that once believed in its higher and nobler calling." At this moment his page entered with a packet. "Lights!" said Evelyn, carelessly—for, as our readers will have already divined, he was the melancholy soliloquist—"I may as well read the Cardinal's epistle at once;—but I am no tool for his purpose. Whatever may be the wrongs and the discontent of my old companions, it is not to serve the interested views of France, fain to disturb Charles's government, that their energies should be called into dangerous action. A time may come when the spirit of resistance it is now useless to excite may rise hopeful and enlightened in defence of those civil and religious rights, whose value will be more deeply imprinted in men's minds every hour. But not now—their present defenders have lived too soon."

He opened the Cardinal's epistle, which con-

tained little beyond indefinite offers of service and expressions of consideration ; while towards the end a wish was thrown out to see him. But this letter contained another, with the brief remark, “ My niece, Madame de Soissons, now in England, has met with some friends of yours, and of whose communications she has taken charge, as the enclosed will explain, which she requested might be forwarded at once—a wish I have had much pleasure in immediately obeying.”

Evelyn took the letter, but curiosity for a moment was lost in a yet more powerful feeling. Madame de Soissons was by him chiefly remembered as Marie Mancini, his friend and almost confidante in Italy. Her image could not come alone, and Evelyn forgot the scroll while thinking what had been the fate of her more lovely but less fortunate companion. How had his brother's death affected her?—did she know of it? Alas! into what depths of misery might she now be plunged! On his arrival in Paris, whither he had come straight from Ireland when Henry Cromwell allowed the King to be proclaimed, he had used every possible means to find her abode; but no traces could he discover, beyond the fact that she had certainly left the capital; but whither she had gone all his attempts to learn

were in vain. At length, in hopes of escaping from reflections so fraught with bitterness, he opened the letter, which ran thus :

“ DEAR MR. EVELYN,

“ For as I mean to claim the privilege of an old friend, I shall not abate one atom of our former kindly feeling,—I give you full permission to be as much surprised as you please at my thus addressing you, provided to surprise you add patience, and read my letter with the attention which I can assure you it deserves. I write in the earnest wish to promote your happiness—a little for your own sake, but still more for that of another. That other is my nearest and dearest friend, whom you knew as Francesca Carrara.”

At the sight of that name, which had been so long absent from all save the depths of his own memory, the page dropped from his hand—he rose from his seat, and began to pace the room hurriedly; and when he again resumed the perusal, the added paleness of his brow, the blood upon his bitten lip, belied the forced composure with which he took up the paper. It continued as follows :

“ She is ignorant of my writing—I would not tell her—for your faith has been severely tried, and may have changed. Should another, there-

fore, have consoled you for her supposed falsehood, it is but merciful to spare her suspense, at least. I shall have done her the justice of explanation, and saved her the wretchedness of knowing that it has been made too late. You have both been strangely deceived, and by the treachery of one who was bound by every tie of honour and affection to your service."

But it is needless for us to repeat this portion of the Comtesse's letter; our readers are already acquainted with the cruel deception which Francis's likeness to his brother enabled him to practise—how completely it failed, even while undiscovered—and the confession to which death so soon put its seal. Her change of fortune was also narrated; and the epistle concluded with these words:—

"But, under all circumstances, Francesca's attachment to yourself has been her ruling feeling. Prosperous, courted, as she is at this moment, her heart is yours—dearly and truly as when your earlier vows were pledged amid the pine-forests by the old palazzo. If fettered by other ties, send me one line—if not, come to England. I am aware that you are an exile, but it is not in Charles's nature to be very inexorable; a few

prayers, and, if need be, tears, and I am sure we shall obtain your pardon.

“ Accept the best wishes of

Your sincere friend,

“ MARIE DE SOISSONS.”

Evelyn leant his head on his arm, confused and dizzy with happiness. Francesca, his only and long-loved, unchanged, and with a heart but the more dearly his own for its many trials!—methinks all the suffering of a miserable life were overpaid by that moment of exquisite enjoyment. Again and again he read Madame de Soissons' letter—he required repeated assurance of his happiness—he paced the room now in that fever of the spirits so delicious in its unrest; and this was the cavalier who, half an hour since, had seen nothing but evil upon earth—who was hopeless and discontented, and looked upon the future as a desert, and life as a burden.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“ I tell you, you shall wed him !”

“ LADY FRANCESCA STUKELEY, may I request your presence in my library ?” said Lord Avonleigh, with the air of a philosopher or a Spanish minister of state, or whatever else may seem most important and imposing.

Francesca followed, reluctant enough in her secret ; for though she would not have admitted it even to herself, she did shrink from the infliction of the inane solemnities with which her father garnished his discourse — to say nothing of the ungracious reflections which so often glanced at herself.

“ Matters of import require time,” said he, waving his hand, and taking an attitude in his chair, very far from insensible to his long-lingering personal graces ; “ I therefore beg you will

be seated." Francesca obeyed, a little marvelling on what matters of import she could be deemed worthy of consultation. "To continue a noble name is one of the first duties incumbent on its possessors—and most unfortunate it is when an ancient line ends in a female." Francesca knew not very well what answer to make to this. Lord Avonleigh, however, spared her the trouble, by observing, in what he meant to be a consolatory tone: "I know what you were going to say—that it is not your fault that you are a woman."

"Only my misfortune."

"And a very great misfortune it is, under the present circumstances. However, the true philosophy is that which makes the best of every thing. I have, therefore, arranged the following plan. The house of Avonleigh is too ancient to be merged in any title, however exalted. I have therefore settled that, when you marry, your eldest son will inherit his father's honours, but your second will represent my name and lineage."

"Suppose I do not marry?"

"I never suppose impossibilities."

"And if I should not have two sons?"

"And pray, why should you not? His majesty has already most graciously spoken to me of your marriage; and I myself have observed the admira-

tion with which the Duke of Buckingham has been pleased to distinguish you. But one point remained to be settled—and that his Grace has accorded—namely, that the title of Avonleigh should descend to the second son.”

Francesca could almost have laughed at the facility with which Lord Avonleigh had laid out the future according to his own will and pleasure; but her own position was too serious for mirth—now or never must she tell her father that he could not reckon on this disposition of her hand and heart—or rather hand only, for the heart seemed the last thing in the world that entered into his calculations. A myriad of beginnings to her intended discourse darted into her mind; but, as is usual in such cases, she chose the one the very worst suited to her purpose. “I never intend to marry,” said she, in a faltering voice.

“Very proper to say so,” replied her father, with an air of gracious encouragement. “Marriage should always take young ladies by surprise. It would be contrary to the dignity of my daughter to accept the Duke of Buckingham on supposition. I am well content you should refuse him beforehand.”

“My father,” said Francesca, rising from her seat, “I pray you listen to me for a few moments,

and do bear in kindly remembrance how different my life has been to the general run of feminine experience."

"I could not help your being left to run wild half over the world; so don't reproach me with it," exclaimed Lord Avonleigh, half pettish, half sullen.

"I reproach no one; but I would fain entreat you to remember, that many years—youth's most eager and sensitive years—passed ere I knew there was a human being to whom I was accountable for my actions."

"And now you have only to obey my commands."

"I will obey in what I can; but affection is neither in your power nor even in my own."

"Affection! and, pray, what have you to do with affection?"

"Very little indeed," replied his daughter, the tears she could not repress glistening on her long dark lashes; "and yet I have known it, Sir, long before I was aware of a father's claims upon my obedience. My heart was given, and my hand promised, to one who, though noble and rich himself, yet delighted to share his prosperity with the poor Italian orphan. Circumstances, which it would only weary you to detail, prevented

the fulfilment of that contract ; but I hold it dear and binding as I did in that brief hour of happiness when my faith was pledged, never to be recalled."

" And pray," asked Lord Avonleigh, almost inarticulate with anger, " what foreign adventurer has entrapped the romantic fancies of a foolish girl? What sun-burnt count, with some unpronounceable name, and a palace in ruins, looks forward to the tangible delights of English gold wrung from the gullibility of his easily-to-be-talked-over father-in-law? His name, girl!"

" His name is as ancient as your own, and has more than once been thought worthy of an alliance with the house of Avonleigh."

Her father's brow grew darker than she could have believed that fair smooth brow could have darkened—his lip was white with anger. " Speak!" muttered he, in a tone of subdued rage, subdued but for the moment. " Your lover's name!"

" Robert Evelyn," said Francesca, in a scarcely audible whisper, for all her resolution sunk with the effort of pronouncing his name.

" I thought as much : but it matters not ; for never shall Robert Evelyn wed daughter of mine, unless he take her pennyless and discarded. Why, your cavalier is a rebel—an exile, whose property

is confiscated, and for whose neck the gibbet stands prepared!"

"And for whose sake I will bear an unchanged name and an unaltered heart to my grave."

Lord Avonleigh walked to and fro; but anger was a wearying exertion, and rage soon subsided into pettishness.

"Respect for our illustrious guests must induce us to wave these family quarrels for the present; but, mark me, Francesca, accept the Duke of Buckingham when he offers his hand, or, the moment that our visitors leave, I will lock you up in the south tower, on bread and water, to learn obedience when it is too late to practise it." So saying, he quitted the apartment, having recourse to that grand resource of the wounded feeling or the aggrieved temper, namely, slamming the door after him.

CHAPTER XXX.

“ We are the unwilling sport
Of circumstance and passion.”

SHELLEY.

THE next few days passed pleasantly enough to the majority of the visitors in Avonleigh Castle. Madame de Soissons amused her own leisure by amusing that of the king. Hortense and Mielleraie indulged in those gentle speeches which say so little, yet look so much, and whose charm is so soon exhausted, and never renewed. The Chevalier de Joinville made a third in every *tête-à-tête*, and was *de trop* in none; for he always talked to them of themselves, or entertained them at the precise moment when there was, though unconfessed, some slight approach to ennui. The Duke of Buckingham was devoted to Francesca, somewhat marvelling at the slow progress which he made, but rather animated by the indifference of the lady than otherwise. Lord Avonleigh was happy in

the duties of a host; to hear him talk, Atlas was but an allegory of himself—the weight of two separate worlds, loyalty and hospitality, rested on him; besides, he had the enjoyment of occasional sneers at the folly of women, together with their obstinacy; and also at the error of romantic attachments.

All these hints Hortense and her lover considered as levelled at themselves; to which, however, they were perfectly indifferent, only retaliating by ridiculing his habits, manners, &c., and finding in this said ridicule a perpetual source of conversation, whenever sweetness required *sauce piquante*. I believe they were rather grateful to him,—a standing subject of laughter is invaluable, especially to the young, who like what they laugh at. As they advance in life, laughter, in common with all things else, grows bitter—it expresses scorn rather than mirth.

Poor Francesca might seem the offering to Fortune made for the rest of the party. Every word of her father's cut her to the heart. The very fact of her childhood and her youth having passed without being the object of that near and deep affection, made her exaggerate its happiness, as we ever exaggerate the unknown. And now that she found herself, and by no fault of her own,

an object of indifference, nay, of dislike, where she had so long gathered up her hopes, cruel indeed was the disappointment. In every point of view her situation was most irksome; from morning to night there was a perpetual demand upon her attention, and the slightest relaxation was sure to be visited by Lord Avonleigh's petulant reproaches. The Duke of Buckingham's suit was an additional annoyance; without ever saying enough to warrant a decided refusal, he was always at her side, trying every possible variety of flattery and amusement; but his being her lover destroyed all that might have been agreeable as an acquaintance. Francesca absolutely hated him. How often, when her thoughts were far away, did he break in upon them, and force them back to the weary realities before her! Entirely filled with the image of another, her heart, indeed, had the deaf ear of the adder, which heedeth not the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. The Duke was too shrewd not to perceive that he lost, instead of gaining ground. A rival was, of course, the only solution; but who was that rival? Certainly not one in their own circle. He watched every word addressed to another—he examined every look, but all were alike cold and careless; and he soon arrived at the conclusion,

that none in the Castle interfered with his interest—he therefore had the field to himself; *les absens ont toujours tort* was repeated, and on that maxim he proceeded. He saw that Lord Avonleigh had little indulgence, and less love, for his daughter; and that on her he vented that temper which fear or interest repressed in other instances: her home was unhappy. And how many women have believed that any change must be for the better, and only discovered their mistake when too late to remedy it!—a time, by the by, at which mistakes are usually found out.

“ Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; ” and how long had Francesca suffered under this heart-sickness! Again she felt a return of that utter despondency which had fallen upon her after Guido’s death; but then she could indulge in it unmolested, and that was something of relief: now she was forced into exertion, that sort of exertion of all the most tiresome, because the least interesting—a constant attention to people to whom she was indifferent, and to trifles which she could not even fancy to be of consequence. Oh this weariness of the forced spirits! and yet is there one human being but has known it? The brightened eye, which is fain to turn aside and weep; the lively answer, which says all but what is most present to its

thoughts ; the fatigue of body which follows this toil of the mind ; the heartlessness, the hopelessness of such a task recurring day after day—never assert that hell comes only after death, while such a hell as this exists, and is known, alas, to common experience ! How eagerly did she seek for an hour of solitude, though that solitude was only filled by haunting fears and vain regrets !

One evening, with what a sensation of relief did she contrive to escape from her guests ! Madame de Soissons had a head-ache, and had retired to her chamber. Charles, for lack of other amusement, proposed cards, and formed his party of Lord Avonleigh, the Duke of Buckingham, and the Chevalier de Joinville. Francesca only felt too grateful to the table which attracted attention from herself. The beautiful evening soon drew her from her apartment, and she wandered forth to a little lonely nook in the *pleasaunce*, which was her favourite haunt. The terrace, which a few warm days had induced the gardener to line with some noble orange-plants and early roses, was soon passed through. Francesca paused with tearful eyes over the round, fruit-like buds and broad shining leaves, which brought another country to her mind, and descended to a shady walk, where, a few weeks since, the pale snow-

drops had spread like waves of that white fall whose name they bear. On either side was a straight row of yews, "*Deuil de l'été, et parure de l'hiver*;" and this ended in a little wilderness, where the lithe and scented shrubs were placed in careless yet graceful profusion. As yet, it was rather the promise of spring than spring itself. A faint green indicated the coming foliage; though, save on the early hawthorn, scarce one full-formed leaf had expanded. But the air was sweet with thousands of violets, for the turf was filled with them; and even their large and shadowy leaves could not hide the azure multitudes that seemed to have caught the shadow of noon's bluest sky. In the midst was a small clear pool, which gave back the first sunshine of the morning, and reflected the rising of the earliest star. It was now silvered over by the tremulous line of light which came direct from the young moon, as if it were a love-message, illumining the dark but clear waters, like the one touch of poetry to be found in every human heart. A few daffodils grew on the further side, their pale beauty falling white upon the shadow, the slender stalk bending over its own reflection in vain desire. A few more sunny days, a few more moonlight evenings, and it will repeat its own sweet deceit, and strive in vain to reach its beloved

image. Nearer and nearer it droops—every hour seems to hasten their union. It comes, but it is bought by death; the leaves fall on the treacherous mirror; and, lo! the likeness which they have worshipped has perished with themselves—fit emblem of that passion for the ideal which haunts the tender and the imaginative mind through life, ever desired, and never realised. And who is there that, at some time or other, has not devoted the hope and the dream of life to a shadow?

Close beside the tranquil pool, for the moonbeams melted harmoniously into its quiet depths, was an old tree. Two stems had once sprang from the same root; one had fallen, and the other leant mournfully over the stream, as if sadly waiting the time which would mingle its own dust with that of its beloved companion, and weary of the green honours of the coming spring, in which it delighted no more. The old trunk was overgrown with moss, and there Francesca took her seat, flinging down violets on the water, and fancying their fragrant breath, as they gradually sank, reproached her for her prodigality.

“Yes, let them perish, even as all sweet emotions perish!—wasted by ourselves, or crushed by others. Methinks I grow cruel, and am fain to destroy even these poor flowers!” exclaimed

Francesca, as she threw her last violet on the pool. At that instant a rustling was heard among the trees—a quick step on the turf—the boughs parted—and Robert Evelyn stood before her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“ I mean that willing sense of the insufficingness of the self for itself which predisposes a generous nature to see, in the total being of another, the supplement and completion of its own.”

COLERIDGE.

AH me! how poor, after all, is the boasted power of the writer!—his subject-words desert him at “ his utmost need:” but rather be the fault on language itself; for how much is there of passionate feeling that could never yet be written or told! What form of speech may express the happiness of the one half-hour passed beside that lonely pool, which never before imaged a love-meeting so perfect in its affection?—the delicious silence broken by unconscious exclamations; the asking looks that question without a sound; the forgetfulness of past and future, as if life were centred in this one present and dearest dream. Let it pass unimaged, unless by memory. But happiness is like that fairy flower whose home and birth-place are the air, the most unstable of ele-

ments, tossed by every wind, destroyed by every shower,—the frailest, and yet most exposed, of created things. Too soon Francesca was forced to awaken to the precarious situation of her lover ; —an outlaw, he had yet ventured to the place of all others where he was in the greatest danger, where he was so well known, and which also contained his worst enemies.

“ Dearest Evelyn !” exclaimed she, roused by hearing the Castle-clock, heard so distinctly in the calm evening, “ how rash to come here ! Why did not you write ?”

“ Write, Francesca, when I could come !” was his reply.

“ Alas !” whispered the anxious girl, “ it is a dearly purchased pleasure that perils your safety for a moment. Just now, I think I can rely upon all being engaged ; but, God of Heaven ! I dare not think on what a chance may effect ! I shall not have one moment’s peace till we meet again, and yet tremble to think of the risk of that meeting. But, oh, the King seems so kind —so good-natured, he can never refuse your pardon !”

“ I shall have a powerful enemy in the Duke of Buckingham,”—his companion started and reddened ; but she had mistaken the cause, for Evelyn continued —“ Our estate has been confiscated,

and for his Grace's use ; it is too fair spoil to be readily relinquished."

" Let the estate go, if you were but safe ; but how can you hope to remain in this neighbourhood undiscovered ?"

" There are true hearts among our trusty foresters ; I sleep as securely in the shelter of its lonely glades as ever king did in his guarded palace. Were it but for my father's sake, there are many here who would forfeit life and land to guard me from harm. Believe me, dearest, I am in no danger."

" But you encounter all risks in seeking me—selfish that I am to feel so happy !"

" I can well forgive such selfishness ; but, tell me, when shall I next see you ?"

" Alas, alas !—how can I see you, and yet not trifle with your precious life ? I have no means of communicating with you. Alice, my attendant, is kind and true, but too timid and too simple for trust."

" I can easily find messengers that may be relied upon. I will send to you to-morrow, for I must see you again. My beloved Francesca, our destiny is now in our own hands. I can no longer offer the fair halls and the broad lands of the once honoured house of Evelyn ; my portion is an ob-

scure home in a foreign country ; but if love tried by years, by utter hopelessness, by what seemed change in yourself, and which yet but became more deep and more intense,—if such love can be security for your future, that future, Francesca, you will entrust to my care.”

She said nothing, no colour rose into her pale soft cheek ; but she looked up in his face, with her whole soul in her eyes, and extended her hands to him ;—Evelyn caught them in his, and then clasped her tenderly to his heart. “ To-morrow ! ” was the last word of each ; and he sprang again into the thicket. Was ever music at once so sweet and so sad as the echo of his receding steps ?

Francesca stood listening long after they were past. Slowly she returned towards the Castle, but how changed since last she trod that path ! Her step was light, and a conscious smile played round her beautiful mouth, while the gladness of other days returned and lighted up her large black eyes. How querulous, how unfounded did her discontent now seem ! The bright records of the last hour effaced all the darker traces left by long and weary days. It was a long-forgotten feeling the eager hope to which she resigned herself. With the active fancy of her sex and

country, she called up their future life vividly before her. They would live in Italy, and those summer skies, whose stars they had so often, with all the poetry of early passion, called to witness the gentle vows which love so delights to make—those very skies would brighten around their home, where affection would more than realise its promise and its dream.

Francesca could feel no regret at leaving England. How much sorrow, how much anxiety, had she known upon its soil! Never had her southern frame become accustomed to its chilling vapours and its driving winds. How often had she turned to the glorious elements, the green and fragrant earth, the sunny atmosphere, of her delicious land! “I leave nothing,” thought she, “but Guido’s grave.” Lord Avonleigh she felt had no claim. With what selfish indifference would he have sacrificed her in the first instance! His late acknowledgment had been wrung from him in a moment of hasty fear, when a heavy and terrible misfortune had startled him with a superstitious dread of a sudden judgment, which is the religion of a weak mind. Since then, with what coldness, what unkindness, had she been treated!—the one selected victim of his petulance, because so dependant upon it. And now, with what hard

cruelty had he decided upon her marriage!—her affections not only unconsulted, but derided; his own ambition the sole consideration to which her happiness was to be sacrificed, and sacrificed as a thing of nought—not to be weighed for a moment against his own marquisate and the future honours of his line. “A few kind looks,” thought she, “a few encouraging words, a little, a very little love, and I should have been so grateful! and grateful I should still be, for I am at least spared the struggles of a divided duty.”

Francesca returned to the gay circle in the Castle, somewhat more silent than her wont, and with eye more downcast—her soul sought to brood over its own sweet thoughts; but there was a flush of beautiful delight upon her face, and her mouth relaxed with an unconscious smile.

“The dews of the evening have been a very bath of beauty!” whispered the Duke of Buckingham.

Francesca blushed, and the Duke thought it was at his own compliment.

“I am making some progress,” was his agreeable reflection. “I observe that she does not blush at flattery in general; she therefore blushes because *I* flatter. Confusion is love’s first symptom.”

He was mistaken, as people usually are when self-love is in the question. Good Heaven! when we observe what egregious nonsense other people talk, what woful follies other people commit, sure we must be tempted to turn upon ourselves and ask — “What do I do that is equally silly?” We may feel quite sure that we form no exception to the general rule; we make our mistakes like the rest, and take our turn in the round of universal foolishness. Human egotism is very much exaggerated. No one in reality occupies less of our thoughts than we do ourselves. We seriously consider the qualities of others, we dilate on their folly, question curiously on the motives of their actions, and investigate all the recesses of their minds into which we can penetrate. We never do so by ourselves. Who ever sits down to think over himself? Self is the only individual we take for granted. Were the character of any one of our friends to be sketched with tolerable accuracy, we should recognise the likeness at once; but let our own, drawn to the very life, be brought before us, we should not know it, and even when told, we should in all probability deny the acquaintance.

The Comtesse de Soissons read the bright colour that fluctuated on Francesca's cheek more

accurately. The moment they were alone, she exclaimed—

“ You have seen Mr. Evelyn ? ”

“ To-night ! ” replied her companion, in a faltering voice, as if afraid to trust the very air with her treasured secret.

“ You look very pretty on the strength of it. I only wish a lover improved my complexion as it does yours. But I don't take these matters much to heart now. And so, in the true spirit of a knight-errant, our hero has run into all sorts of dangers and difficulties, as if on purpose to shew his lady what a very imprudent choice she has made ! Well, I intend enacting *la fée lumineuse* or *bienfaisante* who is to extricate you. Just dramatise the situation—take Charles by surprise ; and my diamonds against your destiny, that our fairy tale ends with a benevolent monarch, a marriage, and a—‘ they lived very happy for the rest of their lives. ’ ”

CHAPTER XXXII.

“ That day, the first of a re-union,
Which was to teem with lip communion.”

WORDSWORTH.

EVELYN was soon in the depths of the forest after his parting with his mistress. If her image did not entirely occupy his mind, it at least reigned paramount over every other conjured up by the scene. And herein lies the difference between the love of man and that of woman. In his active and hurried career, it is impossible that love should hold the lonely and undivided empire it does over an existence of which it is at once the occupation and the resource. It is in solitude that the imagination exercises its gigantic power; and where are a woman's feelings nurtured but in solitude? The one passes so few hours alone, the other passes so many. What impassioned thoughts, how much of that poetry which first creates and then colours the future, haunt the lonely morn-

ings and the long evenings, when the tapestry grows almost mechanically beneath the hand, but when the mind is wholly given up to the heart! A young girl has rarely any thing to call forth that romance inherent in every nature but the idea of her lover; and what a world of deep and beautiful feeling is lavished there! Every reverie in which she indulges is a poem, filled with the fanciful, the true, and yet the unreal.

But, however deeply and entirely a man may love, he can only yield to its influence the hurried moment, the occasional thought. Every day brings its toil and its struggle; and to meet these demands his mind must give its utmost energies. He cannot pass weeks, months—ay, and years—the eye fixed upon its daily task, but the fancies wandering far, far away. His soul must be in its labour: all the active paths in life are his own, and he must bring to their mastery, hope, thought, patience, and strength; he may turn sometimes to the flowers on the way-side, but the great business of life must be for ever before him. The heart which a woman could utterly fill were unworthy to be her shrine. His rule over her is despotic and unmodified; but her power over him must be shared with a thousand other influences.

Francesca herself would more than have par-

doned—she would have sympathised with—the memories of pain and regret that flung a deeper shadow on his path than even the ancient branches that swung mournfully above.

He was oppressed by a nameless terror in his soul—he seemed conscious of the actual presence of that inexorable destiny whose iron rule is over this world; in whose tyranny there is no pity, and from whose decree there is no escape. Toys that we are in that cruel and gigantic hand, we think, plan, resolve, and execute,—when, lo! some slight circumstance defeats our utmost wisdom; or else the issue of our effort has been the very reverse of our hope. And yet we boast, “the soul to do, the will to dare,” while every hour that passes by mocks us with our infirmity, and every event laughs our purposes to scorn.

He was now pursuing the very paths that had been haunted by his youthful dreams: how had their generous hopes been disappointed—how had their best efforts failed! What a lesson of human inconsistency was graved on the last few years! England had been laid desolate as by a foreign war—the best blood in the country poured forth like water—noble feelings wasted, evil ones called from their hiding-places by impunity—battles fought on the harvest-field—lives spared

by the sword demanded by the scaffold,—and for what? The tumult was over, and all things returned to their old place; and the abuse remained without remedy, and the wrong without redress. Ah! if the doctrine of amelioration be true, what a mighty debt does the future owe to the past! And alas for those who have gone before! Methinks the struggle has been but ill repaid.

Evelyn pursued his way through the forest, often pausing to note its familiar beauty. The sky was of that faint blue which, together with the thin white clouds flitting over it, indicate a change about to take place in the atmosphere, as if the present calm were too spiritual to last. The germ, not the leaf, was on the bough: but the boughs alone cast a deep shadow around, save when some fair glade was filled with moonlight, and the ground shone silvery and tremulous; for the beam on the long grass had an effect like water.

More than once, through an opening in the outskirt, he caught sight of a shadowy outline on the air, and knew the turrets of his old ancestral halls. “How many of my fathers,” thought he, “have dwelt there in glad security, while I, the last of their name, wander proscribed on a soil once their own! Ah, Francesca! we could have been very happy to have dwelt beloved within those

walls, with no wider circle of usefulness than our own tenantry, and our hopes bounded by our daily horizon."

His path now led into the deeper recesses of the wood—silent and solitary depths of shade, known but by few. His passing parted the near branches, and startled the deer from their slumber amid the wild flowers. He could see the timid creatures darting away, the moonlight glittering on their horns, till they vanished amid the darker shade which rested on the far-off and hidden dells.

His course now lay along a little brook, which rippled on its way, singing like a child out of the gladness of its own heart; and he listened, for his ear was caught by the sweet low music which the pebbles made amid those tiny waves. Suddenly there came the faint echo of some unusual sound,—it grew more distinct as he drew nearer, and at last he could distinguish the union of many voices chanting a grave and solemn air, whose melody came strange and sweet on the midnight wind. He could soon hear the words—they were those of the twenty-third Psalm; and the beautiful expression of entire confidence in the Almighty eye that was to watch over their safety, and in the Almighty hand that was to guide, came like a

rebuke to the questioning discontent of his previous mood. What were the few passing bubbles of this life in the boundless eternity whose balance is hidden far from human eye?

Evelyn paused on the top of a hanging bank, which enabled him to command the scene below. Some twenty or thirty men and women were gathered in the ill-omened dell, which took its name from Rufus's Stone. Most of the faces were familiar to him, and all wore the same exalted and earnest expression, as every eye was upraised to the moonlit heaven, and every lip joined in the sacred song. In the midst stood one who leant exhausted against a tree—listening intent, but lacking power to swell the solemn strain. He was so wan, so altered, that Evelyn at first could scarcely recognise Major Johnstone.

It was obvious that this was one of those meetings held by the stricter sect of the Puritans, who, debarred from the free exercise of their religious observances, were fain to congregate in the lone forest and the silent night, and render up that worship whose danger was the best proof of its sincerity. There was not a stir nor a sound save that harmonious chant, which rose as if ascending, a worthy offering, to the Heaven above. The forest was like a mighty cathedral: the arches of

the dark boughs were motionless like marble, while the pale moonlight kindled the glorious roof—a temple consecrated by the Eternal to his worship!

The young exile felt his spirit grow calm, and the beatings of his heart more still, as he listened to a hymn so often heard in boyhood, and never without reverence.

The notes died away in the distance; a light breeze sprang up and ruffled the leaves, as if the natural unrest of that vast wilderness had only been hushed by the influence of that calm and holy song. The voice of prayer now arose, and the group knelt, with folded hands and bowed faces, on the earth. Evelyn could hear the supplications for help in their present trouble, while some implored a blessing on what seemed a great and painful enterprise.

Evelyn was now convinced that he saw a band of those determined emigrants whom he had before heard were about to quit that country whose rulers, with short-sighted policy, would have persecuted them to the death, or else forced them into hypocrisy,—as if the sincere and the conscientious were not the very sinews of their country, or as if any form or ceremony could

justify the interference of man between man and his God!

The government of Charles soon departed from its early moderation. The Puritans were obnoxious in every point of view—both as regarded the past, with which revenge, both public and private, had a long and bitter reckoning, and on account of the pure severity of their manners, in such contrast to the license gaining ground every hour, and which, if it did not pay the homage of hypocrisy, at least yielded the acknowledgment of inveterate dislike. Moreover, their uncompromising adherence to what they believed to be matter of conscience, was a perpetual reproach on the time-serving expediency of a court, which looked not beyond immediate indulgence and present convenience.

Fine, imprisonment, and contumely, met the more rigid at every turn; and many began to loosen the ties which bound them to their native soil, and look to a dwelling beyond the ocean, where at least they might worship their God in peace. For this they met amid the forest boughs, instead of beneath the ivyed roof and within the white walls of churches, which had become places of insult to their belief; and a brief hour was

snatched from night and sleep to pass in prayer and praise.

But the present time had a duty beside its religious offices. The group now assembled in that lonely dell assembled there for the last time. Never more would that accustomed atmosphere be filled with the voice of their thanksgiving—never more would those wild flowers yield to their knees bent in prayer!—other and mightier forests would echo their sacred song, and a strange herbage be pressed in their hour of adoration. Even now, the vessel rocked upon the waters, and in three days those pilgrims would be on their way to America. The everlasting Shepherd, who had guided his chosen people through the wilderness, his hand would be over them as well, and the broad Atlantic would yield at last another Canaan of peace and rest.

Evelyn saw many whom he knew well, and only waited till the service was completed to speak to them. But the assembly had hardly risen from their last act of silent prayer, when Major Johnstone addressed them. At first his voice was almost inaudible; but soon the spirit mastered the body, and his hollow but distinct tones gained a supernatural strength. His face was colourless,

his large and sunken eyes gleamed with a strange and lurid light; his thin hand upraised shone in the moonlight—so emaciated was it, and so wan. The damp glistened visibly on his brow, and there was not a listener but felt that he was in the presence of death.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“ There is a nobler glory, which survives
Until our being fades.”

SHELLEY.

THE body and the soul are not friends, but enemies. The one curbs and confines, the other wears and shatters. Perpetual is the terrible struggle, till death parts the mortal and the immortal; and life, the riddle, is lost in the deeper secrets of eternity. And yet, though constant has been the warfare, how fearful is the parting!—what unutterable visions—what awful revealings—what dark knowledge, haunt the final hour! Long vigils—fastings that wore away the strength of day—prayers that banished sleep from night—hoarded vengeance, that, like a fire, consumed its abode—affections crushed to the very earth—a memory whose love was with the grave—a faith that had coloured itself with mortal passion,—all these had pressed too heavily on the springs of

life and thought ; and that stern fanatic and republican had long stood upon the verge of insanity and death. He had been chosen as leader of the emigrants about to cross the wide Atlantic ; and his energy had been the stimulus and the bond of their union. He felt the chill of that earth with which he was so soon to mingle creeping over him. His hands stiffened as he extended them ; but his purpose was still strong within him.

“ Mourn not,” he exclaimed, “ that ye are about to quit the green fields and the pleasant gardens in which your eye delighted—mourn not for the homes wherein ye have dwelt from infancy. Let the porch be deserted, and let the stranger sit by your hearth. Never more will ye hear the bells on a Sabbath morning, breaking the sacred calm that rests on the quiet valleys, and calling ye to pray where your fathers have prayed, and awakening all old memories of love and reverence, as ye pass the graves where the green grass and the wild flowers are undisturbed as the sleep which they make beautiful. All these must ye leave behind ; all that ye have held sacred, all that is most precious, must now be as the things of yesterday. Your path is across the stormy waters—your home in the primeval forest.

The wild beast will howl around your resting-place, and the fierce Indian will track your way; the voice of the torrent and the tempest will be familiar as the singing brook and the April shower; the fruits of the earth will be strange to your taste, and its herbage strange to your eye; the redbreast will never more stand by your threshold, but the bird of prey will darken the sunshine, and the snake cross your daily vision. Danger, and toil, and long suffering, are before ye, but faint not on the way which it is appointed ye shall go. The Lord is with you, and be not cast down, though ye suffer for conscience' sake. The mighty wilderness will hear the voice of your prayers. Ye will build yourselves houses beneath its ancient trees; your fields will reward your toil, and your cities arise fair and strong; and though ye now abandon the graves of your fathers, your children will dwell in faith and hope around your own. Go! in the name and for the dear sake of that Saviour whose name ye will not hear outraged, and whose altar it is yours to keep free from a stain."

Suddenly the speaker paused, his whole frame agitated by a convulsive motion; his face shook with yet more deadly whiteness, and his eyes, wild and dilated, fixed on Robert Evelyn, who, in the

interest of listening, had stepped beyond the shade of the boughs, while the moonlight fell full on his uncovered head.

The excited imagination of Major Johnstone was impressed with but one image—that of the young cavalier whom he had sentenced to death. He believed that the tomb had sent back its prey, to mock his hopes and rise up in judgment against him. Strange, he had never felt regret—he had held his act but the execution of a righteous judgment. Now, like still waters chafed by a sudden tempest, a flood of remorse rushed at once upon his soul.

“Come ye in warning or in mockery?” muttered he, in a half-choked voice. “Francis Evelyn, I adjure ye, speak!” and he sank back senseless in the arms of those beside him.

All gathered round; but when it was perceived that he was slowly recovering, many approached Evelyn with words of welcome and of wonder.

“He mistook you for your brother,” said an old man, who was rubbing the rigid hands he held in his own. “It was a harsh judgment that sentenced that young and brave cavalier to die like a dog. He might have been spared, had it been but for his father’s sake.”

It was some time before Johnstone recovered the full use of his faculties; his eyes unclosed but to stare fixedly upon the bank, which, however, was now unoccupied. He then remained for some moments in silence and inward prayer; when the same old man who had spoken before, said, "Here is a young friend of yours asking for you; he used to be a favourite,—Robert Evelyn."

"I did not spare his brother for his sake, nor yet for the sake of his father—mine own and familiar friend!" and again he relapsed into moody silence.

He was roused by Evelyn's approach, who could have no feeling but pity for the worn-out and dying being. He asked some questions respecting the proposed emigration; and again the haggard countenance before him kindled with the heart's strong purpose.

"It is the will of Heaven!" exclaimed Johnstone, in a tone of strong excitement. "I know that at this moment I stand on the threshold of eternity! I have looked on that which none can see and live. I shall sleep in the green earth of England. Robert Evelyn, in the name of your God and of your father, I commission you in my stead. Lead ye this remnant of true believers across the unfathomable ocean; guide them amid

the gloomy forests of that other world: may their safety be required at your hands, and may power and judgment be given unto you! You are young, but brave and thoughtful beyond your years. Do ye accept him as your leader?" said he, addressing those around. A low but impressive murmur came from every lip; and the speaker, turning to Evelyn, bade him kneel that he might bless him.

Evelyn knelt upon the ground, and bowed his head. Involuntarily he started at the touch of the icy hand which pressed down his hair. Major Johnstone strove to speak, but the words died in an inarticulate gurgle low in his throat; and Evelyn had only time to start from his knee, and save the dying man from falling to the earth.

They spread a cloak upon the grass, and laid him there, while Evelyn supported his head. His features grew black and rigid, and his eyes seemed to refuse to close—as if conscious that, were they once to yield, they would be dark for ever.

Suddenly he raised himself, and whispered, "I have a letter for you."

With a strong effort, he took a scroll from his bosom; it was that written by Francis Evelyn previous to his execution. "I would the heavens

were not red with that young blood,—it darkens, darkens!”

The words expired on his lips—his mouth fell—his head sank upon Evelyn's shoulder,—the others gathered round, and gazed upon the dead!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

—— “Happiness!

It is the gay to-morrow of the mind,
Which never comes.”

BARRY CORNWALL.

“Now, I am quite sure that our beautiful hostess has been making an assignation,” soliloquised Charles, who, for want of something better to do, had been watching the various actions of the group in the principal chamber in the castle, where every window was open to the soft south wind, and the air was vocal with the humming bees, and sweet with the breath of the flowers placed in gay profusion on the terrace.

He had noted, with his usual quick glance at a pretty face, Francesca's attendant catch her mistress's eye before she approached, and that, under the pretence of bringing her some music, she had given a note. The maid sustained her part with great readiness—not so the mistress.

Francesca's hand trembled as she broke the

seal, and the colour rose crimson to her temples as she glanced at its contents. With ill-concealed trepidation, she penned a brief and hurried answer; and Charles saw with what tremulous anxiety it was given to the girl, who shewed a true genius for her vocation, and, by dint of throwing down some loose sheets of music, and then picking them up, contrived to place herself between her lady and the rest of the company.

Alice left the room; but Francesca still busied herself with the strings of her guitar. A very novice in deception, she fancied all must notice her manœuvre, and could as little restrain the vivid blush as she could still the beatings of her heart.

Charles followed the girl into the gallery, down which she was slowly proceeding, holding the little twisted scroll in her hand, and looking at it with that expression of fear and curiosity which seems to say, "Now, if you were not so intricately folded, I would open you and see your contents; but I shall not be able to replace these folds in proper order if I do—still, I have a great mind to try."

Her indecision was of short duration; for Charles, whose approach she had not perceived, suddenly snatched the note from her hand, and,

well acquainted with the mysteries of its shape, opened it, and read its contents, before the girl had recovered her surprise.

“ A pretty messenger you are,” said the volatile intruder, “ to let your mistress’s notes be caught in this manner! Why, you are not worth your ribands! I shall certainly take this one back to the Lady Francesca, and give her some good advice how she sends letters by you any more.”

The girl had but her sex’s usual resource, and she availed herself of it—that is, she began to cry, or rather whimper, exclaiming, “ that she should lose her place!”

“ Place! place!” said the King—“ if it comes to that, you must have the paper back again. There is a fatality in the word: ‘ place! place!’ is the cry with every one who comes near me. For God’s sake, keep your present one—for really I have none vacant at this moment.”

“ There—you have unfolded it!” And in her despair at the numerous folds, Alice forgot to observe the contents.

“ Pshaw!—there, all’s right again—but you must pay me for my trouble.” So saying, he re-twisted the note, kissed the bearer, and walked off with a careless composure.

The damsel might admire, but not emulate.

One good effect, however, was derived from the interruption; she now only became impatient to get rid of a note which had caused so much trouble already, and might occasion more; and in five minutes it was safe in the keeping of a boy who waited for it, and who, the moment he received it, darted off with a rapidity which might have served as an example to Alice when sent on her next message. Like most good examples, it was not one by which she was likely to profit. The truth is, Alice felt her dignity compromised. Her lady evidently had a mystery, and she was not intrusted with it. This led to two resolutions: first, to discover; secondly, to reveal it.

Some one says, Keep your secret yourself, for how can you expect others to do that which you cannot? Still, I am persuaded more secrets are revealed by being kept than by being told. You enlist a person's honour, and, still dearer, their vanity, on your side by confidence. We all desire to deserve the good opinion which we believe we have inspired; but distrust awakens all that is little and mean within us. Why should we be better than we are held to be? We are mortified by not being thought worthy of trust; and there is also a feeling of small triumph in circumventing those who doubt either our inclination or our

power of service. We like to shew that we are not the nonentities for which we were taken.

The contents of the epistle which had excited so much curiosity were but a few words; but how much did they imply! They ran thus:—"Meet me to-night, between seven and eight, by the little pool in the wilderness. I think we are there secure from disturbance." There was neither address nor signature.

"The appointment is expected," thought Charles, "and the lady's handwriting too well known to need her name. Every precaution is taken, so that, even if the note were lost, it would not be of much consequence. So much caution indicates a most promising mystery—*nous verrons.*" And the King returned to the terrace, where Madame de Soissons was talking to the Duke of Buckingham and the Chevalier de Joinville. They looked so well amused that he decided upon joining them.

"I am glad," said the Comtesse, "of your Grace's appearance. Will you interpose your authority, and insist upon their being convinced? It is very provoking to be so much in the right, as I am, and for them not to perceive it."

"Mine is a limited monarchy," said Charles, smiling; "but I will exert my utmost influence

on your side of the question, when I know what it is."

"I am maintaining that it is a mistake ever to regret the past."

"Ah, Madame! a week hence, and I shall not be able to agree with you. Nay, the mere foreknowledge that you will soon only have me in your remembrance convinces me that regret is man's natural destiny."

"I will take the compliment for the present, and wave it for the future. I am universal in my views, and see no reason why I should be regretted more than any thing else. What is the use of regretting the inevitable?—and if not inevitable, it is better to remedy than to regret."

"But not so easy," remarked De Joinville.

"We should never spare our trouble," returned she; "the trouble our wishes or pleasures give us is the secret of their enjoyment. Ask the Duke, if the possession of any heart ever equalled the pursuit."

"Ah," said Buckingham, "that is because no heart is worth the trouble which it took to win."

"There I agree with you; but the trouble was worth itself."

"I must protest," exclaimed De Joinville,

“ against your sweeping assertion, that every heart is worthless.”

“ Oh, I will admit of exceptions; but the very exception proves the rule. Love-making would be very insipid, but for the little difficulties, vanities, and misunderstandings, which diversify its progress.”

“ A lover’s progress,” added the Duke, “ is like the races which the ancients were wont to run, carrying torches—the competitors usually contrived to extinguish their light before they reached the goal. So, in love—ay, in life—one bright hope dies away after another, and leaves us nothing but to regret that it was our own hurry that put them out.”

“ Regret again!” exclaimed Madame de Soissons. “ Instead of lamenting over the extinguished torch, we ought to try to kindle another.”

“ Or rather,” replied De Joinville, “ do without either. We should try to cultivate monotony much more than we do. We work ourselves up into excitement, when we should rather compose ourselves into content. We should trace and retrace our steps. No path appears so short as that which is well known. Ah! change is a great error—the variety of existence only reminds us of its weight. Who are the happiest individuals

of our acquaintance? Those whose existence revolves in the smallest possible circle—men whose daily horizon is bounded by their dinner—women whose hope extends not beyond their knitting needles. We should endeavour to forget that we are alive; instead of that, we keep renewing the mournful remembrance in every possible manner. We aggravate our miseries by mocking them with the name of pleasures. We insist upon disappointment by the pure force of unreasonable expectations.”

“ Well,” interrupted Buckingham, “ honour to the system which Pythagoras discovered in a bean-field! Pray, believe in it with all possible haste and fervour. They say faith works miracles; and the doctrine of transmigration holds out a prospect of future felicity to you, as an oyster or a dormouse.”

“ Or a stick, or a stone,” said Charles.

“ No, no, the oyster for me,” replied De Joinville. “ Let me have the consciousness of repose. Happiness is nothing, unless we know it.”

“ And hence it is nothing,” rejoined Buckingham; “ for who knows that they are happy?”

“ We are much happier than we like to admit,” said the Comtesse; “ but complaint is too gratifying to our complacency. We love to talk of our-

selves, but we are obliged to manœuvre for listeners. Were we to dilate on our beauty, our wit, or our wealth, all the self-love of our auditors would be up in arms against our own; they would never have patience to hear the list of our inherent or acquired advantages. But let them triumph over us, and we insure their patient attention. Gratified envy takes the shape of pity, while we mourn our misfortunes, our faithless friends, and all the bead-roll of grievances which authorises the luxury of lamentation. The truth is, we like to talk over our disasters, because they are ours; and others like to listen, because they are not theirs."

"You take a bitter view of human nature," said Charles.

"*Mais, mon Dieu!* it is the truth," replied the Comtesse. "Let me say the very worst of it that I can, I do not say half so much as it deserves."

"As representatives of the human race," replied the Duke, "we beg to offer our grateful thanks for your good opinion—unless you mean to make an exception in favour of your friends."

"Most assuredly not," was her answer; "for it is among my friends that I have acquired my experience."

CHAPTER XXXV.

“ One freeman more, America, to thee !”

BYRON.

THE meeting in the forest had completely changed Evelyn's position. A band of fifty individuals, to many of whom he was bound by former ties of service, and with whom he was linked by the strong bond of mutual belief and opinion, now looked up to him as their leader. He felt the responsibility in which he was so suddenly involved, but he did not shrink from it. A channel was now opened for the efforts which it had hitherto seemed so fruitless to make, and for the energy which, during months past, had wasted itself in dreams of the impossible. The wild savannah and the dense forest rose vividly before his imagination. The one would soon grow golden with its summer harvest, and the other soon ring with the axe, the first sound of coming civilisation. There might be danger, there would certainly be difficulties; but what danger has not human

courage braved — and what difficulty has not human patience surmounted?

America was then, as now, the Utopia where both the religious and political enthusiast saw visions and dreamed dreams. Little could they anticipate the wonderful and practical fulfilment of their wildest expectations of liberty and prosperity. Little could Evelyn foresee, when he but hoped that those deep woods would afford a shelter from persecution, and a home to a little band of persecuted exiles—how a few (few when we think what they have accomplished) passing years would level multitudes of those giant trees, fling open to the sun those secluded glades, and in the haunt of the wild pigeon and the woodpecker build up stately and vast cities, whose destiny is but now beginning. When Robert Evelyn pictured to himself the lonely canoe destined to bear himself and his small and adventurous bands down the silver stream of some river unconscious of the white man's skill, how little did he deem that the hour was on its way when a thousand vessels would cleave the rapid tide, bodiless air working as their servant, and the banks would swarm with multitudes busy in all the various toils of daily subsistence, ministering to a commerce whose home is the world.

Child of the Earth's old age, America is the

favourite on whom a double portion has been lavished. The glorious sky, the fertile soil, the harvest ready above, the mine rich beneath, and, more than all, a brave, free, and intelligent race, who but must feel that the world's great destinies are yet unaccomplished, when the mind dwells on the glorious promise which kindles the far shores of the broad Atlantic? The most creative imagination avails not to picture the noon of that mighty hemisphere now in its infancy. Other nations have sprung up amid darkness and disorder; but America commenced its onward career when our world was in its prime, and has the experience of all civilisation for its beacon. Commerce, science, and freedom, are its fates; and the web over which they preside is but begun.

But one dearest interest mingled with the future in Evelyn's meditation. Alas! it was a hard choice that he had to offer Francesca. How often during that night did he re-trim the lamp that burnt beside his lowly pallet, to read his brother's letter! "Good God!" thought he, "is it possible that one human being can so trifle with the happiness of another, in the more reckless pursuit of excitement and amusement? Had he really loved her, I at least must have pardoned him—I, who know how very, very dear she is.

But he had not even the excuse of passion to plead for his violation of my confidence, his betrayal of my affection—I need to recall his untimely grave while I forgive him. Alas! how our youth has been wasted in doubt and sorrow—and to know how happy it might have been! How much anxiety, too, would our previous marriage have removed! The wife with whom I had shared my prosperity would not have turned aside from that adversity which I shrink from offering to my bride. And yet, methinks, I might judge her heart by my own. No change could alter the deep affection treasured there.”

He was right, both in his regret and in his reliance. It must be matter of pain to any man to know that his love must demand sacrifices—and too well did Evelyn feel that for his sake Francesca must renounce home, father, friends, station, country—the privileges of gentle birth, the delicacies of wealth;—that for his sake she must prepare to meet difficulty, privation, hardship, danger, and even death. It was hard for a lover to have only such a choice to lay before the beloved one. And yet he was right in his entire confidence. Francesca loved him as those love who have loved but once—the freshness and truth of early years strengthened by

trial and by absence. She had essayed the value of affection both in its possession and its want; and she felt the strong confidence of an attachment at once thoughtful and passionate, in a future shared by Robert Evelyn. Life could have no path so rugged but what she were content to track at his side. Evelyn preferred speaking to writing; he had asked an interview, with something of affection's gentle cunning in his thoughts. Surely, when painted by him, the future would not seem so desolate; and, moreover, he could read the impression in her eyes before her words found utterance. Their interview that night would determine all.

Evening came at last, though never had day seemed so long to Francesca. The constant consciousness of having something to conceal harassed her like a spectre. Her feverish and excited imagination conjured up every possible variety of misfortune, and read cause to fear or to suspect in every face around. She could not help contrasting her fate with that of Hortense Mancini, who, having decided on selecting her own choice, fairly set her uncle at defiance—an uncle to whom she owed at least the obedience of gratitude—and yet every circumstance combined to favour her. The very plan laid to unite her with another only

enabled her to meet Meilleraye with less restraint. The worst she had to apprehend were a harsh word, a dark brow, and perhaps delay; but her own constancy was only needful to secure the future. "We were born on the same spot—we have grown up together—yet how different," exclaimed Francesca, "has our lot in life been!" She thought mournfully on Guido's early grave; and its darkness seemed to gather over herself.

Madame de Soissons entered into none of her apprehensions, and felt all the pride of art in the necessary deception. As the hour approached she contrived to collect the whole circle round her; but as Buckingham and Lord Avonleigh were the only persons likely to interfere with Francesca's arrangements, to them her attention was chiefly devoted. The Duke accepted her challenge to the card-table, and Lord Avonleigh was detained to give his advice—and even about an odd trick it is pleasant to have one's advice asked and taken. She paid attention to Lord Avonleigh, with a little feeling of triumph all the time to think she was duping him; and the Duke had a similar sensation towards herself—for he was quite persuaded that he had at length succeeded in conciliating Francesca's most influential friend.

Considering what a useful thing deception is—

the first and last lesson taught by what is called knowledge of the world—it is woful to observe how much of it is wasted. In nine cases out of ten, the most ingenious invention not only does not answer, but even defeats its own purpose. How much attention is thrown away, how often is flattery mistaken, and how many of our devices, like ostriches, blind their own eyes, and fancy others are blinded too! In the present case, danger, as usual, lurked in the quarter the least suspected. In the morning the King had been wearied with another of those loyal and long-winded deputations which Lord Avonleigh deemed such a credit to the county; and, drawing an arm-chair into one of the recesses by a window which opened upon the terrace, declared, that, were it but for his own credit, he must sleep off the effects. “I believe,” exclaimed he, “stupidity is infectious.”

“I wish your Grace pleasant dreams,” said Madame de Soissons, as she passed by on her way to the card-table.

“If your image haunts them, I cannot go to sleep too quickly.”

Marie did not observe how soon the sleep to be charmed by her smile was flung aside, and that the opened casement afforded an easy escape to the awakened truant.

In the mean time Francesca had withdrawn under that universal feminine excuse—a headach; and indeed it was no pretext, for her temples throbbed with the feverish pain brought on by agitation; and lip and cheek were alike pale. It was a relief to find herself in the open air; and with a rapid and light step she hurried towards the wilderness; when, to her surprise and dismay, as she turned a sharp corner in the shaded path which led towards it, Charles stood immediately before her. It was equally impossible to retreat or to advance without speaking to him.

“ I see,” said he, with a smile, “ that you, like myself, are trying the effect of this sweet evening for the headach. I have already found it very efficacious, and so, I think, have you,”—again smiling, as he noticed the deep blush which his sudden appearance had produced. “ Do, pray, take compassion on me,” continued he, “ and allow me to accompany you on your walk. The evening is very lovely, and the quiet of this place delightful; but I always need a companion to enjoy the charms of solitude.”

What could Francesca do, but say, in an almost inarticulate voice, that “ she was very happy?”

The King enjoyed her confusion, and took his place at her side; and, if any thing could add to

Francesca's consternation, it was, that he took the exact path that led to the little pool, beside which she was to meet Evelyn. Madame de Soissons would have had a thousand resources in this emergency—Francesca could imagine but one, and that one so difficult, it seemed almost impossible.

“ I trust,” said Charles, “ you will not think that I undervalue my present felicity, when I remark upon the cruelty of fortune. What an opportunity of calling ‘ yonder moon to aid his vows ’ is lost for ever to Buckingham !”

This was said maliciously ; for the speaker well knew nothing embarrasses a woman more than talking of one lover while she is thinking of another.

“ There is something,” continued he, “ in this soft and gentle air, that makes one feel quite charitable. I am almost inclined to fetch George here, and go for ever after by the name of the martyr to friendship.”

“ I beg,” replied Francesca, “ that you will do no such thing.”

“ Oh ! you are satisfied with myself, are you ?—very flattering. What shall I do to shew my gratitude—make love to you ?”

“ It were a pity that two things that I hold so precious—love and your Grace's time—should be so utterly wasted as they would be on me.”

“ I can assure you, I should not think either wasted on your adorable self.”

“ But I should,” answered Francesca, calmly.

“ You are not a judge,” said Charles, somewhat piqued. A little confusion would have flattered him; but self-possession is the most provoking thing in the world.

“ I am, as far as concerns myself.”

“ You are quite wrong to speak so decidedly. A pretty woman should never have an opinion of her own. Indecision is so very charming.”

“ I am afraid it is a charm quite wanting in myself. I both make up my mind and keep to it.”

“ Pray, have you made up your mind as to what sort of a lover you would like?”

“ I have.”

“ You have rather taken me by surprise. I expected you to say that you never thought of such things—that you never expected to have a lover at all.”

“ I should not then have spoken the truth.”

“ I begin to suspect that you have some lover or other in your head.”

“ In my heart, please your Grace.”

“ You are very candid,” exclaimed Charles.

“ I mean to be still more so,” replied Fran-

cesca, in a low, earnest voice, "if you will take the next path, and permit me to accompany you part of the way on your return to the Castle."

"In short, you want to get rid of me, as you are going to meet some one more favoured. And, pray, who is the cavalier?"

"I must rely on your honour as a gentleman, that the confidence you have drawn from me will be sacred. I fear me the name will find but little favour in your eyes. I am about to meet one whose life is risked in the meeting,—an outlaw—Robert Evelyn."

The King started in displeasure and surprise. "And how did you become acquainted with that young fanatic and rebel?"

"In earlier and happier days. We met four years ago in Italy."

"And why did you not marry then?"

"He had not his father's consent; and I could not leave an aged parent, then dependent on my care."

"And have you not met since?"

"Never till within the last two days. God knows, our attachment has, from the first, been surrounded by distress and by difficulties!"

"And yet you have loved on? But no marvel that he now seeks Lord Avonleigh's heiress!"

“ Lord Avonleigh’s heiress will be none to him. The hour that sees me his wife sees me portionless, and exiled like himself.”

“ But do you consider the folly of renouncing all your present advantages? As Duchess of Buckingham, think what a brilliant destiny offers itself to your acceptance!”

“ I am as indifferent to the Duke’s rank and wealth as I am to himself. More I cannot say.”

“ And have you no fear of the dreary realities of seclusion and exile, when the present romance of an excited fancy shall pass away?”

“ Were I actuated but by a mere fancy, I might tremble to act upon its hasty impulse. But there is a love that is stronger than death, and deeper than life; for whose sake the sacrifice is light—ay, even unfelt. It is a love which, born of the pure and fresh feelings of youth, grows with your growth and strengthens with your strength—a love which would give sweetness to a palace and glory to a cottage—a love prepared to suffer; to endure, and yet suffice unto its own happiness—tried by time, by doubt, even by despair, and yet living on—the heart’s deepest hope, and life’s dearest tie. Such a love do I feel for Robert Evelyn.” Her beautiful eyes filled with light, and her cheek grew pale with intense emotion.

Charles gazed on her for a moment—so spiritual, so touching was the expression of her perfect features. He took her hand kindly, and said, “ Mr. Evelyn is happy, very happy. I know not what are his views in coming to England at this moment. You, fair lady, shall be the guarantee of his peaceable intentions. Since I find that his exile includes yours, and as I cannot in conscience allow a face so fair to go out of England, bring Mr. Evelyn to my presence, equally penitent and loyal, and you remember the old proverb—

‘ A king’s face
Should shew grace.’ ”

Francesca sank on her knee, and pressed her lips to the hand which still held her own.

The good-natured monarch raised her, saying, “ I will detain you no longer. However, it is all right that the gentleman should be the one to wait.” So saying, he turned towards the Castle ; and Francesca, taking the opposite path, was soon out of sight.

“ I believe, after all,” said Charles within himself, “ love is a more serious matter than we allow it to be at Whitehall. I did not expect to be so much interested as I have been. Poor child ! she is too pretty to go into exile. But I can more

easily pardon the lover than restore his estate. His Grace of Buckingham keeps a tight hold on the manors that come under his grasp. However, love and poverty are companions of old. *Nous verrons.*” And trusting, as he usually did, to chance, the King returned to his arm-chair, and soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“ Love is not love
Which alters where it alteration finds.”

SHAKESPEARE'S *Sonnets*.

It was a beautiful but stormy-looking sky that canopied that lonely pool and the lovers, whose shadows were scarcely visible on the dark and undisturbed water below. On the far side was reflected a single red and meteoric cloud, which had treasured one last crimson ray from the sunset, or perhaps nursed within it the fiery leaven. It was a strange contrast to the black and heavy masses which were gathering every moment overhead. The moon had swollen into a full and golden round ; but the clouds swept athwart her, and her fitful gleam came but at intervals. A low wind seemed gaining strength amid the branches ; but it was uncertain, and sometimes not even a leaf was stirred. But there was light enough to shew the tranquil beauty of Francesca's pale and sweet

face. She stood at Evelyn's side in that quiet and intense happiness which is so rare a feeling in the lot of humanity.

He had told her all,—the arduous enterprise in which he had embarked: he had softened nothing of the dangers which would surround their future and forest home. But she felt that, shared with him, life had no lot that would not bring its blessing; and he, as he gazed into those clear dark eyes which rested on him so confidently, that if the most entire, the most devoted love could repay the woman that trusted to its protection, that love was his own. Both knew, in their inmost soul, that each was the other's happiness. The heart confided in the destiny itself had created.

“I feel too happy,” at length exclaimed Francesca, in a voice soft as the moonlight silence which it broke; “and yet 'tis strange how the image of death is uppermost in my thought, as if I desired that the grave should be a security against further change! At this moment I could be content to die.”

“Ah, dearest!” replied he, “your spirits are exhausted,—perhaps unconsciously oppressed with the idea of that future whose pain and whose peril I have rather heightened than palliated.”

“ Not so,” returned the young Italian, fixing her large black eyes upon him with a wild and melancholy expression. “ I think not of the future—my whole existence is, as it were, absorbed in the present. There is something within me which says, ‘ Yield to the delicious repose which now stills every beating pulse : life has known no such soothing tranquillity before—it will never know it more.’ Ah, Evelyn! you cannot conceive how wretched my life has been—how desolate, and how miserable! I am not accustomed to be glad, and to be loved. I cannot help the dread, which haunts me like a perpetual shadow, that fate will exact some terrible penalty for this moment’s feeling.”

“ Nay, my beloved Francesca, this is the vainest folly that ever made an omen of its own weakness.”

“ Omen!” repeated she, in a low, broken voice, that feared the sound of its own words; “ omen!—you have said aright. The shadow flung from the soul is an omen; and mine at this very time holds some mysterious communion with its fate. There are some whose web in life has a dark yarn even from the first—dark and brief—a gloomy river, with a short and troubled course. And such is mine. I look back on that which has been,

and dread that which may be. How much of care, how much of sorrow has been mine! I am so little accustomed to happiness, that I tremble in its presence."

"I would rather, my dearest! believe that the future owed the past a debt. Many, many years are before us—years of tender watchfulness, of mutual hope, of devoted love. I would that the old tales were true, which held, that life had its annals in those stars which are now looking down upon us, and that I had an enchanter's skill, and could bid them reveal from their shiny depths the truth and worship of a heart that henceforth encircles you with itself. The strength of my love communicates itself. With you and for you every thing seems possible."

She did not speak, but stood gazing in silence on the water at their feet,—one bright moonbeam was trembling upon it. Slowly a mass of dense black clouds came sailing upon the air; a sudden wind shook the branches—the dark vapour parted, but a portion swallowed up the line of radiance that had vibrated among the waves, and the whole pool lay in darkness.

"That is my fate!" whispered Francesca. "Struggles, shadows, a transient beauty, and then the night comes—the long last night of death!"

Evelyn saw that her nerves had been too highly excited; and, to divert her from these imaginative phantasies, he turned to the more actual exertions required by their situation, and resumed the plan of their arrangements, which their late conversation had interrupted.

“ This very night, my beloved Francesca, you must be mine for ever. I have seen St. Aubyn to-day, and told him how entirely my every hope in life rested on the present interview. At ten o'clock he will wait for us in the church. The hour will secure us from intrusion, and I can rely on St. Aubyn. Can you, dare you meet me? ”

“ Yes! ” said she, in a low but steady voice.

“ The Castle once left, the forest path is lonely but safe. I would meet you here, but I have a sacred duty to perform, — ”

“ And, ” interrupted Francesca, “ there is so much risk in coming here! For my sake, you must be cautious. ”

“ But, dearest, the forest is dark and solitary. Are not you afraid? ”

“ Afraid of our quiet woods, with those of America before us! You cannot think how brave I mean to be. Besides, I know the path to the church so well. ”

“ To-night, then, we meet at the altar, and to-morrow evening we sail. Pause, my own love, if your heart falter—even on the threshold of the church.”

She spoke not; but the strong affection of those large and tender eyes needed no aid from words. The lovers parted, and neither looked back—they must have said farewell again if they had.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

“ Farewell, farewell ! if ever prayer
For other’s weal availed on high,
Mine will not all be lost on air,
But waft thy name beyond the sky.”

BYRON.

FRANCESCA made no attempt to leave the solitude of her own chamber that evening. It were indeed a vain show to play the hostess, whose reign of courtesy was drawing so rapidly to a close. She needed to compose her thoughts—to still her excited nerves ; but she strove, without avail, to shake off the profound depression which hung over her. She sat lost in a gloomy reverie, from which she was roused by observing that the sand had run from the hour-glass, which she had turned mechanically when she first took her seat. Hastily she rose, and drew the table towards her. She had resolved on writing to her father, but it was an irksome task ; still it needed to be done. “ This,” thought she, “ is the second letter which I have addressed to him. With what different

feelings did I write the first! Alas, the folly of hope—the certain disappointment which awaits on all earthly expectation!”

For a few minutes she could not see to write for her blinding tears; but the emotion was subdued, and the hurried scroll once began was soon written; for when she came to give expression to her feelings, the sense of injustice steadied her hand, and dried up her tears. The letter contained the following words:—

“ Before these lines meet your eye I shall bear another name, and own another duty than yours. I do not implore for pardon; the child who forgets a parent’s love in a new and less sacred affection may well kneel in the very dust for forgiveness; but such forgetfulness is not mine. You do not—you never did love me; you will not miss me, and anger in your mind will be utterly unsoftened by regret. I cannot help this. I complain only of my adverse fortune. Had I grown up beside your hearth, a thousand endearing recollections would have bound me to your care. But I was forced upon you. I came connected with a thousand unwelcome associations; and the unfortunate death of my brother turned every thought of me into pain. The kind word, and kinder look, have

been to me unknown. I go; but I leave no void behind. I feel that I owe to Robert Evelyn a dearer debt than to yourself. As he would have shared his prosperity with me, so will I share his adversity with him. I believed myself to be a poor and a friendless orphan when I pledged that faith which I will not retract as your rich and titled daughter. There were no truth in the world if I could depart from mine. The wide ocean will soon roll between us—let it wash away all unkind thoughts. I shall think of you, pray for you; and if in after years one gentle feeling, one mournful remembrance, should arise, I implore you to dwell upon them. They will be dear in that after world where alone we may hope to meet again. God bless you, my father!—you cannot dream how at this moment my heart yearns towards you. When the first anger is over, you will believe in the sorrow which dictates these last words of farewell. Again, God bless you!

“FRANCESCA.”

She folded the scroll, and her tears fell fast upon it, and her hand trembled so that the name of Lord Avonleigh was almost illegible. She then placed it in the casket where it was destined to remain for the present, and prepared to leave her

chamber. She looked at her mourning dress, and for an instant felt tempted to change it. "What folly!" exclaimed she; "what matters the outward sign? The custom is but a chance;—no colour was predestined by nature to be the type of mourning."

She retrimmed the lamp, which was to be her companion, and, drawing her cloak round her, prepared to set forth. The outer door of her chamber was fastened; but from her oratory was a winding staircase which communicated with the chapel, and she had in her possession the key of the small side-door which opened into the garden. Through that she meant to pass. It was in vain that she called all her resolution to her aid on entering the chapel. The cold damp air sent a chill through her whole frame. The dark vaults below had given to the heavy atmosphere the frozen breath of the sepulchre. The sculptured figures glared strangely upon her—she almost fancied that the rigid features frowned on this intrusion into their still domain. Her lamp could not penetrate the darkness around, and one by one those pale statues came within its little circle of light, and each wore a more ghastly hue, and a more lowering brow, than its predecessor. The wan countenance of Albert, as she

last saw him—the colours of life gone from his cheek, and the red tide welling slowly from his forehead—rose upon the gloom. She put her hand before her eyes, but in vain—the faces wore but stronger semblance to humanity. Her imagination only repeated the phantom shapes, and with more awful likeness. At last she reached the door, unlocked it, and sprang into the open garden.

Terror dwells amid the works of man, not amid the works of nature. We tremble beside the tomb—we shrink from the icy vapour of the charnel-house—the foot walks unsteadily over the stones placed above the dead; but the green grass and dewy flowers create no fear. Francesca felt mournful, not timid, as she watched the uncertain moonlight break from the huge black clouds which sailed across the heavens. With slow and reluctant step she forced herself to return into the chapel; for in her hurry she had brought her lamp with her, whose assistance she no longer needed. She entered, and with a tremulous hand placed it behind one of the monuments, so that its light would not be visible from the windows, while it would be in readiness for her when she came back. There was a skull carved on the stone, and on that the flame glared as the

draught from the open door swept by. The death's head seemed to start from the marble with an awful reality ; — was its meaning, half mockery half menace, addressed to her ! She rushed away, and, pale and gasping, again reached the garden. She paused for an instant, and leant against the trunk of an old hawthorn, which, placed in a southern aspect, had already a few sweet blossoms on the sunny side ; their fragrance revived her, and ashamed of the childish fear to which she had yielded, when time was so precious, she hurried along the path which led to the forest. Still and dark were the glades which she had to pass, and a low moaning wind complained amid the branches : it was the great voice of Nature breathing in inarticulate murmurs that sorrow which is the universal soul of all existing things. And yet the air was soft and warm, and filled with that aromatic sweetness which belongs to the early spring.

Francesca let her cloak fall from her head, to enjoy the pleasure of breathing the fragrance unimpeded ; as the cool breeze came so refreshingly to her fevered temples. How beautiful she looked as the moonlight fell around her ; its pale and subduing light suiting so well with those sculptured features, and glittering in the depths of those large and radiant eyes ! And yet there

was a deep and sad expression on that brow, too thoughtful for one so young; and the smile on that lip was sweet, but never glad. Every look bore testimony to the inward and profound melancholy born of that long suffering which dares not trust itself with joy, and originating, too, in a temperament sad and sensitive by nature. We look on such, even in their happiest moments, and fear for them. Destiny has its favourites; but such are not of the number.

Francesca did not meet a creature in the forest; the wind was the only sound, and her own thoughts her sole companions: one was uppermost in her mind. The path she now followed to meet the living had hitherto been only traced when she had sought to commune with the dead—it led direct to Guido's grave.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“ Lean on me, love !
 Oh, such a bridal night befits not such a bride ;
 but if truth
 And tenderness can pay thee back for comfort,
 Thou shalt ne'er regret the time.”

The Bridal Night.

FRANCESCA'S heart beat quick when she quitted the forest. She saw the square grey turret of the church, with the clear full moon just above it. Another moment and she would be at Evelyn's side. Still, as the little wicket swung behind her, she paused, all other thoughts lost in the impression produced by the solemn beauty of the scene. Large clouds were coming up rapidly upon the wind, gloomy ministers of fate, charged with the rain, the storm, and the thunder ; from one of these the moon had but just emerged, and her gentle light touched the silvery edges, but entered not the dense mass which rested on the air, black and immovable. Light vapours floated round in a thousand fantastic shapes, soft and snowy, and yielding easy passage to every luminous ray. The

long waving grass below was tremulous with the dew. The ivy, clinging round that side of the old church, shone with its broad green leaves, which caught a double radiance from the moon and from the small diamond panes of the Gothic windows which the long drooping branches enwreathed. There was an uncertain and sad loveliness on the atmosphere, which harmonised with humanity.

There is something in the shadowless sky and the unbroken moonshine which mocks us with repose. We have no part in it; our own unrest has no sympathy with the blue and spiritual horizon, whose hope is not with this life. The calm and quiet light is not of our busy and careful world; it belongs to sleep, to silence, and to dreams; and, alas! we gaze on it with the beating heart and the fevered pulse, while the thousand vain delusions of past and future cast their various shadows before our eyes. Who stands watching in the sleepless midnight, but one from whose pillow repose is banished by one all-present thought? Ambition, hate, love, alike have their vigils; and what have they in common with the cloudless sky, where the moon wanders, placid as the spirit of the good when resigned to die, and confident and filled with another and holier sphere? But the troubled element, the fitful flash, the murky

vapours, the sullen heralds of the tempest,—these have our own likeness cast upon them,—these are nearer to the earth. We read in the aërial struggle the prophecy of our own fate; and as the night-black canopy spreads over the horizon, so darkly does destiny close around ourselves.

Francesca's eye dwelt involuntarily on the graves beside. "Sad witnesses to human happiness!" thought she, and quickened her steps. She needed the relief of Evelyn's presence to banish the melancholy forebodings that came thronging fast to her mind. She started, and suddenly drew back within the shadow thrown out by the church wall. She heard a voice, and in the obscurity saw a group of figures! What could their errand be at that early hour? Surely that sound was familiar to her ear! Once before she had heard the ropes creak as they lowered the coffin into the deep pit; once before she had heard the rattle of the gravel falling on the lid, as if it struck on the very heart; once before she had heard those words, sanctifying the sod over which they were uttered. Whose funeral rites could they be that needed such mysterious and secret solemnisation? The agony of ages passed within her soul—one dreadful thought flashed upon her. She sprang forward; her light step caught

the ear of one of the mourners ; he turned round, and the next moment, agitated and breathless, she was supported by Robert Evelyn.

The funeral service was concluded, and a few words, as he led her to the church, sufficed to explain the scene, which it was not meant she should have witnessed. Evelyn had felt it incumbent upon him to see the last duties paid to Major Johnstone, and only after nightfall could he and others of the party assemble for such purpose unmolested. Slight obstacles, one after another, had delayed the burial, and he had been waiting for some time, at once hoping and dreading Francesca's arrival. She made no remark ; but as they passed one mound, where the wild-flowers grew in more lavish sweetness than on the others, she said, " That is Guido's grave ; — nothing seems present here but death." Evelyn clasped her to his heart silently, and the action expressed with mute but tender eloquence, " There, at least, life and love beat for you, my own Francesca !"

On entering the church, she was met by the affectionate and cordial greeting of Lucy St. Aubyn. The unexpected kindness was too much for her ; it was the last drop that overflowed the fountain of tears that had been gathering ; and Lucy, who had been accustomed to see her so quiet, so self-

possessed, felt her sympathy heightened by surprise, as she bent over and soothed her companion's burst of passionate weeping. Perhaps it excited even a tenderer pity; for those in the habit of giving way to their own feelings look upon self-possession rather as the sign of indifference than of control. Her appearance was soon accounted for. The moment that she heard from St. Aubyn the occasion that required his office, she resolved on accompanying him. She felt, with the quick sympathy one woman has to the feelings of another, that her presence would give Francesca both support and confidence, for she was sincerely attached to her. Besides, there is a strong current of romance in every feminine nature, that delights in the hazardous and the mysterious, especially in love affairs. Lucy, too, had a sufficiently tender recollection of Francis Evelyn to take an interest in his brother, who was also quite handsome enough to inspire that interest for himself. She was aware of the risk her husband ran in performing the ceremony—many a clergyman had been suspended for a lighter matter; but a woman, and a young woman especially, always takes the generous side of a question.

There was no time, however, to be lost; and Evelyn led his bride to the railing before the altar,

where St. Aubyn stood ready to commence the ceremony. He whispered to Francesca, as she knelt, "The ring I have for you was once my mother's—I can give you no dearer pledge."

"Ah!" exclaimed she, in a choked and agitated voice, "it belongs, then, to the dead!"

The service proceeded; and the voice which had so little while since spoken the solemn farewell to a departed soul, now pronounced its blessing over the hopes and happiness of the living.

As Francesca knelt at the altar, there was a melancholy earnestness in her large black eyes, a spiritual expression on her pale features, that Lucy often recalled. She herself wept, for the recollection came often and bitter, that this was the last time they should ever meet; and the difficulties and dangers her companion was about to encounter rose with every possible exaggeration to her mind. Francesca seemed as if her feelings admitted not the weakness of tears; yet it was sad to leave almost the only friend she had ever known, and the grave of one so beloved as her brother. By that grave she had passed this very night, and, in the agitation and hurry, without one prayer or thought; yet, even while kneeling at Evelyn's side, it rose upon her mind as if she had slighted some dear friend.

Young was the bridegroom, and beautiful the bride, and never did blessing hallow love more entire and more devoted; and yet it was a melancholy ceremonial. The cold light of the moon touched every face with unnatural paleness; and the silence was unbroken and portentously profound. No bells, musical in their gladness, swelled upon the hushed air—no kindly congratulations came cheerful from joyful lips; and when Evelyn took Francesca's hand in his—now his own—his bride before the face of Heaven—he started at the marble coldness of the touch. Surely the shadow of eternity and the chill of the surrounding graves were upon her at that moment! She roused herself to say a few words of affectionate farewell to Lucy. "The dream of my whole life," whispered she, "is now fulfilled. In poverty, in exile, in death, I am his for ever."

Lucy embraced her in silence, and her husband's voice faltered, as he bade God bless them.

The youthful couple were left alone in the churchyard. "I have one last and dearest parting to make," said Francesca, and she knelt down beside the lowly grave of Guido.

"Weep not, dearest, for the dead," murmured Evelyn, in the low and gentle tones of love. "He was very dear; but the circle of a deeper affec-

tion is around you now, and the care of a still more tender fondness."

She rose, and put her hands into his. "When death," said she, in a voice that sounded like strange sweet music in the silence, "calls upon me to deliver up my soul, I cannot yield it more utterly than I now do to you."

A sudden noise of hurrying steps came upon the air—the red glare of torches disturbed the silvery quiet of the moonbeam—dark faces lowered upon them—and two men, by a rapid movement, secured each an arm of Evelyn, as a harsh voice exclaimed, "Stand, on your life!—you are my prisoner!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“ Have we not loved as none have ever loved ?
Shall we not part as none have ever parted !”

MATURIN.

BETWEEN the future and the soul there is some mysterious sympathy—imperfect and broken in our present state of existence. With fitful gleams of light such foreknowledge had rested on Francesca, when, conscious of coming ill, she knelt, pale and cold, before the altar. But the actual found her more resolved than the fantasy. In the surprise she had sunk again to her knee on Guido's grave. A woman's first impulse is always supplication. She felt, however, that it was in vain; and the blood of her high race, at the approach of danger, mantled in every vein to meet it. A cavalier stepped forward, offering her his hand to rise, and the moonlight fell full on the face of the Duke of Buckingham. His habitual sarcasm found its way. “ Had I been aware,”

said he, with an obvious mixture of forced gaiety and real chagrin, "that I was disturbing a lady; I fear that my gallantry would have interfered with my loyalty."

Francesca's only answer was the rejection of his proffered aid; and she sprang to her feet alone. Passing the Duke as if she did not even see him, she approached Evelyn, on whose wrists the shackles already placed precluded any attempt at escape, and, putting her hand through his arm, stood quietly by his side.

"Leave him!" exclaimed Lord Avonleigh, who now started forward breathless with anger. "Foolish and obstinate girl! how dare you hold communication with an outlaw and a traitor?"

"I am his wife!" said Francesca—while her calm dark eyes met those of her father unshrinkingly, as if to confirm her words—"I am his wife!"

This brief phrase fell like a thunderbolt on all around. Buckingham looked livid with rage;—here ended his hopes of uniting the estates of Avonleigh and Evelyn. A barrier, impassable as the tomb, was now between him and Francesca: his rival might perish—but there he was, a stumbling-block in his path for ever. And, with that mixture of good and evil blended in all natures,

but in most striking contrast in his own, he remained for an interval touched only by the devotion and courage which in the beautiful Italian took a yet higher tone, when shame and death might have bade a weaker temper shrink from the avowal. But there she stood, her cheek flushed even in the moonlight with generous earnestness, her brow wearing a sad but strong resolve, and her delicate hand just touching his arm, as if to mark by how dear a claim she drew to his side. It was but momentary; and revenge—revenge born of pique and avarice—became the Duke's paramount sensation.

As to Lord Avonleigh, the common phrase of "he was in a rage" precisely expresses his emotion. What he intended to do was not very clear even to himself, but it was to be something very dreadful. He snatched Francesca's arm from her lover's, and his hasty order of "Away with him!" was instantly obeyed; and Evelyn was conveyed at once to a lonely apartment in the Castle, where he was left to pass the night in sleep or thought, as best he might—the first glance round the chamber shewing the utter hopelessness of escape.

"I am sorry, madam," said Lord Avonleigh, "to propose a step so disagreeable as a return to the home which you have deemed unworthy the

honour of your presence ; but I suppose you do not wish to remain in the churchyard ?” Francesca followed where he led, without uttering a word. “ I have been somewhat remiss in courtesy,” said he, suddenly ; “ doubtless, Mr. Evelyn has bidden guests to his bridal festivities ? It is hard that there should be neither bridegroom nor bride to receive them. Perhaps you would wish to make his apologies ? There is no lack of deer-stalkers in these glades to assemble a goodly company in honour of an outlaw’s wedding.”

Still she walked by his side, unanswering. Now, he had expected her to weep, and was quite angry that she did not. He had prepared divers little speeches about women and crocodiles’ tears, and it was very provoking to have them wasted. However, he continued. Talking is to some the relief that crying is to others ; and taunts and reproaches brought them midway into the forest. Had the reproaches been more biting, or the taunts more keen, Buckingham might have been amused by them ; but, such as they were, they proved exceedingly tiresome ; and weariness took the form of pity for Francesca. “ He will certainly talk the poor girl to death,” thought he ; and he looked sympathisingly on her pale and melancholy countenance. “ Lady Francesca,” he said at length,

with that kind yet simple manner he knew well how to assume, "do let me assist you—and from me you shall at least have the benefit of silence."

How unutterably do the wretched feel the least expression of kindness! He saw, as he gave his arm, that her eyes were filled with tears. She was thankful both for the support and for the silence; but how long, how very long, did it seem before they reached the Castle!

As they approached, Francesca turned to her father. The moon was just sinking behind the little chapel, and the complete darkness of the casement shewed a dim ray from the lamp within. "For pity's sake," said she, "spare me to-night the curious gaze of the household—I cannot bear it. May I return through the chapel, and so regain my chamber?"

"That will be the least painful to all parties," replied Buckingham; and leaving her to pass in at the door, he remained on the threshold, to make due explanation to Lord Avonleigh. The kindness here had its reasons. He knew that female tears and prayers were what Charles rarely resisted, and did not desire in this instance that he should be exposed to them; for, with all the Duke's pity for Francesca, he never relented towards Evelyn for one moment.

Lord Avonleigh, at a hint from his companion, followed his daughter into the chapel, and said—
“ If, madam, I permit you, however unworthy, to return to your chamber, there I expect you to remain. I shall plead indisposition as the cause of your absence.”

Francesca bent her head in token of acquiescence, and hastened towards the little winding staircase. As she ascended, she heard her father lock the door at the foot. “ Alas !” thought she, “ how useless the precaution ! All that my heart holds dear is now in the Castle.”

She had scarcely been in the chamber ten minutes, and had not moved from the seat on which she had sunk, exhausted and dizzy, when the door opened, and Lord Avonleigh appeared. “ I just wished to inform you,” said he coldly, “ that even your very hope of my pardon depends on your not interfering with my plans. I have given orders that no one, excepting your own attendant, approaches your chamber. I advise obedience, for your own sake ; it is your good that I have in view.” And without waiting for a reply, he withdrew, and Francesca heard him lock the door and take out the key.

“ I am indeed a prisoner,” exclaimed she, as she sank back hopeless in her chair, more alive

to Evelyn's situation than her own. She paced the room in agony ; for, unacquainted with English laws, she even exaggerated his danger. Accustomed to the tragic histories of her own country, the midnight dagger of the assassin was uppermost in her thoughts. Every noise made her start ; and the wind, as it howled round the battlements, seemed in every gust to bring the low groan of the murdered.

Lord Avonleigh certainly meant to punish his daughter ; but the penalty was far beyond what he had dreamed. He had no designs on Robert Evelyn's life. To have him exiled again, and the marriage with Francesca cancelled and concealed, was the plan that floated before him. The envy he had felt towards the house of Evelyn was appeased, and some remembrance of early friendship and former ties arose within him. But he was provoked ; the marriage of the banished heir with his daughter was like a triumph over himself ; he could not endure it.

Lord Avonleigh was an angry rather than a vindictive man. Vindictiveness requires more energy of character than he possessed. Indeed, it may be questioned whether he would of himself have taken the violent measures of the preceding evening. The truth is, Francesca did not

know how to manage him; flattery it never entered her head to use. Moreover, he required to be entreated and persuaded. Had she, from the very first, urged her attachment to Robert Evelyn, by this time he would have become accustomed to it—nay, perhaps have exerted himself in its favour for the mere sake of shewing his power. But, shy and reserved, Francesca shrank from dwelling on her feelings to one who appeared so careless of them. Father and daughter had nothing in common; and the familiarity of domestic life, instead of drawing them more closely together, only served to make the distance more apparent.

But, in the present case, Lord Avonleigh was a tool in the hands of Buckingham, who, having come down prepared to woo and win the beautiful heiress, could not brook disappointment. Indifference—and Francesca's was obvious—in a woman to himself could be accounted for but by one cause, a preference to another. To discover that rival, and revenge himself on him when found, were things of course. With that attention to trifles which constitutes so large a part of the genius for intrigue, he had noted slight signs of an altered bearing in Francesca during the last two days: there must be some reason—either she had seen

or heard from her lover. He coupled this with her absence on plea of indisposition, and at once drew the inference that they had met. Here chance befriended him. One of his attendants had found no little favour in the eyes of Alice, who expressed her suspicions that her mistress had some secret correspondence, for two reasons; first, to satisfy a naturally communicative temper—all common people are communicative; and secondly, in hopes of gaining such assistance as might ultimately gratify her own curiosity, now most uncomfortably excited.

A thread will guide through a labyrinth, and Buckingham soon discovered that his rival was one whose pretensions militated alike against his interest and his love. The fair manors of Evelyn were now his own, and so they should remain; and if those of Avonleigh could be added to them, they should not be lost for want of exertion on his part. The lady herself went for something; he decidedly preferred her to Lord Fairfax's daughter. The wealth which might pass as quite a minor consideration with the one would be needed as the only excuse for the other. He learnt that Major Johnstone's funeral was to take place that night, and that Robert Evelyn would undoubtedly be there. He accordingly applied to Lord Avonleigh,

talked about loyalty and public duty, and demanded that, as a magistrate, he should issue a warrant for Evelyn's apprehension. This was granted with a readiness and yet an embarrassment that at once excited the Duke's suspicions that his future father-in-law knew more of Francesca's attachment than he liked to confess. Both decided on seeing the warrant executed; and the discovery to which it led took both by surprise.

Francesca's avowal of her marriage put hope out of the question, but memory remained; and the Duke considered revenge as a duty he owed to himself. Evelyn had dared to cross his path—let him perish! it was at once a good example and a satisfaction—a good example, which means warning to others, and a satisfaction to himself. “I have been,” muttered he, “dramatising the last week: as it cannot be a comedy, and end with a marriage, let it be a tragedy, and end with a death. I can be the tyrant—Evelyn the lover ordered to execution. Lord Avonleigh has a double part to sustain—the cruel father, and the minister of my vengeance; while Francesca can go mad in white satin.”

It is a curious fact, but a fact it is, that your witty people are the most hard-hearted in the

world. The truth is, fancy destroys feeling. The quick eye to the ridiculous turns every thing to the absurd side; and the neat sentence, the lively allusion, and the odd simile, invest what they touch with something of their own buoyant nature. Humour is of the heart, and has its tears; but wit is of the head, and has only smiles—and the majority of those are bitter.

Buckingham's plan was settled as Lord Avonleigh led his daughter away. There must be no womanish supplications to the King. Charles was to leave the Castle the following day; Francesca could be confined in her chamber till after his departure; and Evelyn, once given over to the common course of law, would meet with little mercy now the tide ran so strongly against the Roundheads and Puritans. Some slight fear he entertained of the Comtesse de Soissons; but, could he contrive to prevent an interview between her and Francesca till too late—and it would be too late after Charles was once gone—the Duke knew him well enough to fear no written petition. All was arranged. Under pretence of avoiding any discussion that might affect the loyalty or compromise the dignity of a noble house, he managed to insinuate all his own suggestions so cunningly,

that Lord Avonleigh mistook them for his own, and was quite delighted—perhaps a little amazed—at his own ingenuity, and actually ended by hoping that the Duke would oblige him by following his advice.

CHAPTER XL.

“ I crave your Grace’s pardon.”

SHAKESPEARE.

How odd it is to think how differently people are employed at the same time, and how sad to think how heavily the burden falls on most! The contrast of the lot of the few with that of the many rather aggravates the misery:—why should they be thus favoured?

The evening, so anxious, so wretched to the young heiress of the Castle, had been passed very cheerfully by her guests. The Queen Mother and her suite had arrived at that age when cards are a habit, a business, and a relaxation. The one or two younger members enlivened themselves by betting sums they could not afford. Meilleraye and Hortense were rather unhappy at the thoughts of returning to France, where their intercourse would be so much more restricted; and Madame de Soissons and the King had drawn two

large chairs near the hearth, the evenings being sufficiently cold to make a fire pleasant. She was talking, though in a low voice, with much warmth, and Charles was listening with an appearance of pleased attention—that is, he was kept awake very agreeably. When the dialogue began, both had determined to speak on the same subject; and what the one wanted to learn, the other wished to tell.

Madame de Soissons possessed, in its perfection, that rare and graceful gift of narrative, which skims so lightly over the surface, and yet leaves nothing unmarked—the keen vein of ridicule mingled with the touch of deeper feeling, and a sort of personal flattery thrown into the whole—something that brings the things described home to your individual experience; and, finally, which forces one idea prominently forward—the attention devoted to yourself, in so much pains being taken for your amusement. She was relating the history of Francesca, and endeavouring to render it as interesting as possible. She took it up from its earliest period, painting her as the lonely child in the deserted palazzo, yet careful beyond her years for the sake of the strange old astrologer, whose wild and wayward habits certainly lost nothing by Marie's description.

“ And yet, your Grace, the young lover then sued in vain. She can now renounce rank and wealth for his sake ; but she could not leave that aged and weary man desolate in his last years.”

Paris came next, and the romance of Italy was left behind.

Charles was greatly amused by the deception of Francis—there was no high feeling in himself that recoiled from such imposition ; still, he felt rather glad that it was not successful — partly, perhaps, because it would have put an end to the story.

Marie’s own voice faltered a little when England became the scene,—the remembrance of Guido rose upon her memory ; it was fortunate, for Francesca’s sake, that it did, for real feeling always excites sympathy.

“ And now think how strong and how enduring has the affection been on each side ! We laugh at these *grandes passions*, and it is well that we should—they don’t come much within our social experience ; but still it is as well that constancy *à toute épreuve* should sometimes exist, if it were only for the sake of Corneille’s tragedies, and Madame Scuderi’s romances.”

“ And also,” interrupted her listener, “ that we may ourselves believe, and be believed. Let

a miracle have happened only once, and we always expect it to happen again in our own case. Fidelity is very good as a precedent,—one true lover helps on the vows of a thousand false ones.”

“ I see,” said Marie, “ your Grace has a fellow feeling for the many.”

“ It excites so much envy to be singular, that I pursue the beaten path from a pure spirit of Christian charity.”

“ Do I doubt the excellence of your motives?— I see you are inconstant only from humility.”

“ I could soon forget to be humble at your side; Madame de Soissons’ fetters are not to be lightly worn.”

“ I would thank you,” replied she, laughing, “ but I have made a vow not to speak of myself to-night. I intend to talk of nothing but Francesca. I am about to leave England; I must implore your Grace to allow me to carry away one pleasant recollection—one whose pleasure will not be painful because past,”—and here Marie took *un petit ton de sentiment*,—“ you must, as a parting favour, accord me Robert Evelyn’s pardon?”

“ I feel most mercifully disposed towards the young Republican,” replied the King; “ your interest throws its own charm around the object.

But this present case quite reverses the old saying, which asserts that the law is one vast cobweb, which the large flies, *alias* the rich, break through, but in which the small flies, *alias* the poor, are entangled. This Mr. Evelyn's estates are sadly in his way. It will tax even your eloquence to persuade George Villiers to give up the broad lands which are now his by right of confiscation; and life without land is but a half sort of pardon. What shall we do with Buckingham?"

"I was not aware," replied la Comtesse, "that the Duke was keeper of your Grace's conscience."

"Faith," answered Charles, "it might be in better hands; but if my conscience is not in his keeping, Robert Evelyn's estates are."

"Oh, they will bear a considerable fine; and there must surely be in this discontented island other rebels, whose estates may be confiscated for the Duke of Buckingham's benefit, and who are not so much in love as to be interesting."

"Well, pardoned he shall be," returned the King, "even at the penalty of George's not saying a witty thing for the next month at Whitehall, excepting at my expense."

"Your Grace," replied Marie, with a most flattering smile, "can repay him with interest."

But a thousand thanks for your goodness. How happy this will make my poor Francesca!"

They now changed the subject, for Marie's quick eye had detected Buckingham's entrance; and she began to draw a laughing picture of the melancholy alteration which their departure would occasion in the Castle.

"These poor, dear, dull rooms—how weary they surely feel of those eternal portraits! What a comfort our countenances must have been!—why, the very old chairs must rejoice in a variety!"

At this moment Lord Avonleigh approached, with a face of solemn distress. "I must entreat your patience," said he, "if I lack to-night somewhat of the courtesy due to my illustrious guests; but I am in great anxiety of mind. The Lady Francesca has been taken dangerously ill—a fever, as my household physician declares. Do not look so alarmed, Madame; every possible precaution has been taken to prevent infection. I have given the strictest orders to interdict any communication between her attendants and those devoted to your service."

"Oh!" said la Comtesse, "I am not the least afraid. I shall request permission to see her. I can assure you she has been my nurse before now."

“ I cannot take upon myself to allow such a risk, both for your sake and—pardon my parental anxiety—for hers. She is now sleeping; and the leech hoped so much from her being kept quiet, that I dare not suffer her to be disturbed. I shall treat her as a prisoner. See, I have in my own possession the key of the gallery which communicates with her apartments.”

“ There cannot be too much care taken in such a case,” said the Duke of Buckingham, gravely, and looking at the King; then, changing his manner to one of extreme interest, he added, “ are you satisfied with only your ordinary advice? Should not you send express to London?”

“ I think so highly of the care I have often myself experienced, that I am content to wait till to-morrow: a quiet night may do much.”

Madame de Soissons urged no more her wish to see Francesca, but joined with the rest in expressing her regret.

The party soon broke up, for it was very late, and the intelligence of their hostess's illness did any thing but exhilarate the circle. We always feel afraid, when any one is taken suddenly ill, that our own turn may come next; for the following day and night, at least, symptoms are equally fancied and watched.

During the confusion of the card-table settlement, Madame de Soissons approached De Joinville, and said, "Was it not your page whom I saw risking his neck for a crow's nest in the avenue, the other morning?"

"I daresay it was," replied the Cavalier; "I have known him risk it for a less matter."

"What could he do in a lady's service?"

"Oh! Louis is *dévoué au service des dames*. You might send him to the end of the world with a smile."

"I do not mean to send him quite so far as that. But, can he be secret?"

"He is my page," answered De Joinville, significantly.

"My question was rather unnecessary. I will ask one more to the point. Will you lend him to me a couple of hours hence, and let his coming to my chamber be enveloped in mystery as profound as M. de Liancour's meaning?"

"He shall be equally undiscovered: Louis would pass a sunbeam and cast no shadow. Two hours hence he shall be with you."

"And, as a reward, you shall be present at the *dénouement* of my romance. There was already a lady, a knight, and a confidante,—there lacked nothing but a page."

“ Louis is perfect of his kind ; but I am very curious.”

“ You must wait till to-morrow. Good night ! and remember that if discretion be the better part of valour, silence is the better part of discretion.”

CHAPTER XLI.

“ There is a certain goddess, called Confidence, that carries much weight in honourable preferments. Fortune waits upon her—Cupid is at her beck: she sends them both of errands.”

The Merchant's Wedding.

“ O, run on my errand, thou bonny foot-page.”

Old Ballad.

LOUIS arrived at the appointed hour, and found the Comtesse eager for his appearance. He was a frank, handsome-looking boy, whose arch smile and quick eye vouched that there were few cases where he might not safely be left to his own resources.

“ Welcome, my young knight-errant!” exclaimed Madame de Soissons. “ I am expecting you to do wonders.”

“ Nothing could be wonderful when performed in your service,” replied the boy, with that readiness of compliment so characteristic of his time and court.

The Comtesse smiled, and continued: “ First, I must take you into my full confidence. I am persuaded that the Lady Francesca's illness is but a pretext,—I want both to ascertain the fact and

to communicate with her. Now, as her father has locked the door, this can only be effected through the window. Do you think you could manage your entrance to the Lady Francesca's chamber?"

"Ay, were it twice as high. The old ivy is as good as a ladder. But, unless I am much mistaken, it must be quite easy to get from your own window to hers;"—and, so saying, he softly unclosed the further lattice. "Yes," exclaimed he, "yonder turret is easily gained,—nothing like your old houses!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Marie, "but the height is fearful! Dare I hazard your life?"

"I would indeed hazard it," replied Louis; "but here I have not even the satisfaction of running a little danger for your sake. Now, what am I to say or do?"

"Give this note to Lady Francesca, and bring me back her answer. But, for the love of Heaven, be careful!"

The page laughed recklessly, and sprang upon the window-sill; in an instant he disappeared.

Marie stood breathless for a moment, and then hurried to the open lattice, and watched the boy's progress. The moon had set; but, as such nights are never quite dark, she could see the shadowy outline of the slender figure as it passed along.

The architectural ornaments—the uneven wall—the tough branches—were ample footing for the adventurous boy, who scrambled on with a rapidity which made Marie's head grow dizzy to look upon. At length he reached the angle of the wall, and it hid him from her sight. She stood at the casement still watching, but could see no more. The night wind was very chill, and she turned away: “My catching cold will not prevent my young adventurer from breaking his neck, neither will it in any way benefit Francesca.” With this remark she drew her cloak more closely around her, and flung herself into an arm-chair by the fire, to await the result.

In the mean time we will proceed to Francesca's chamber, where she was seated, sad and lonely, harassed by every painful image that fancy could conjure up—dreading the morrow, and yet impatient for its arrival. Weary as she was, she knew it was in vain to seek her pillow: people may sleep on the night before execution, but not on that before sentence is passed. No torture, though the human race are most ingenious in their devices of hate, can equal the low fever, the wearing depression of suspense. But a deeper consciousness than even that of actual evil was on the young Italian. She was weighed down by a terrible

foreboding. She sat by the hearth, whose fitful light at times passed over her features. Her long black hair, which, loosened, fell even to her feet, was like a shroud, whence her pale face glanced forth—abandoned by the hope and the bloom of youth.

A slight noise at one of the windows aroused her from her gloomy reverie, and, looking up, she saw that some one was standing before it. The wretched catch at hope, however improbable. Was it possible that Evelyn had effected his escape? But, good God! the danger of such an ascent! She sprang to the casement, unfastened it—and sank back, for she gazed upon a stranger.

The page, who mistook her paleness for fear, exclaimed eagerly, “Do not be alarmed, lady: I come from Madame de Soissons, who is most anxious to know your pleasure. This note will explain all;” and he drew forth a little scroll, and gave it to Francesca, whose hand trembled so that at first she could not break the seal. Louis observed her agitation, and, with a thoughtful kindness beyond his years, led her to a seat, drew the lamp towards her, and then occupied himself with gathering together the brands of the decaying fire.

“ I am not quite deserted !” murmured Francesca, as she opened the letter, which contained these few words :—

“ *Ma belle princesse*, are you immured in a dungeon, or only locked in your own chamber?— I hope the latter, as then my *rôle de confidente* has no difficulties in the way of its performance. I hear you are ill of a fever,—I do not believe it ; but I do want to know what is the matter. What can I do for you ? I have spoken to Charles, who has the most amiable intentions ; the sooner, however, they are fulfilled the better. Mr. Evelyn is sure of his pardon—of his estate, not quite so certain ; however, I suppose you can live upon love. My messenger is trustworthy : you can either speak or write.

“ Yours, in all curiosity and sincerity,

“ MARIE.”

Francesca hid her face in her hands, in a transport of mute but tearful thankfulness. Evelyn in safety and at liberty !—the very hope was perfect happiness. She caught up a pen, but the characters she traced were scarcely legible :

“ I am, indeed ; dearest Marie, a prisoner. Lord Avonleigh and the Duke surprised Mr. Evelyn

and myself together; and he, too, is confined in the Castle. This evening we were married,—to-morrow were to have sailed for America. I had relied upon seeing you to-night, when I should have told you every thing. A pardon is all we ask—let Buckingham keep his ill-gotten estate life, life is our only prayer. And in that far land, wherein our future lot will be cast, with what gratitude and what love shall we remember your name! A thousand thanks! Yours,

“FRANCESCA.”

“Stay yet one moment,” said she, as she gave the note to Louis, and, approaching the dressing-table, took from a casket a Venetian chain, in which the purest gold was moulded by the most delicate workmanship. She flung it herself round the page’s neck, and bade him “wear it for her sake.”

“Not so, lady; believe me that the pleasure of serving you is its own best recompense,” replied the youth, colouring.

“Nay,” said she, “as a recompense it were indeed unworthy; but when I am far away, it will bring to your memory the gratitude of one to whom you have given life, and all that makes life dear.”

Louis kissed the hand extended to him, and, hastening to the casement, again commenced his perilous way. In a few minutes he was in Madame de Soissons' chamber, who sprang from her chair to welcome him.

“ Never was wall scaled so bravely—an omen of future success, when you shall try such an adventure on your own account. But now tell me all.”

“ This letter will do it better than I can, who only know that the lady Francesca is not ill.”

Marie opened it eagerly,—“ Married!—going to America!”—and she sat down fairly breathless with astonishment. “ Oh, they will easily be reasoned out of this folly. Well,” continued she, addressing the page, “ do you give this note early to-morrow into the hands of the King himself. May I trust you to gather some violets? they will pass for an excuse—*un petit brin de sentiment* very justifiable on the last day. Make use of my name to deliver it. His being asleep is of no consequence: wake him,—a lady's message is not to be kept waiting. And here is *un gage d'amitie* for yourself.” So saying, she gave him a velvet purse embroidered in gold, and whose contents were more than adequate to the promise of its glittering outside.

“Most happy,” said Louis, “to be employed in the service of Madame,” and left the room, not the one least satisfied with the result of the night’s adventure.

“This marriage,” thought the Comtesse, “certainly takes me by surprise; but I hold that it will save a great deal of trouble. Lord Avonleigh now cannot help himself—the thing is done. Well, I do enjoy his Grace’s disappointment: the turns of the game have left us pretty even. I have to thank him for baffling my plans about Hortense, while he has to thank me for destroying his own. But I am very tired, and must bid good night to myself.”

CHAPTER XLII.

“ Besides, the king’s name is a tower of strength.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE breakfast next morning had been ordered at an early hour, on account of the intended departure of the royal guests; and, to the surprise of some, Charles was one of the first to make his appearance. He had received the note and the basket of violets. Madame de Soissons was next, and her flattery and entreaties amply confirmed his resolution.

“ You will permit me, however,” said Charles, to take my breakfast first.”

“ Certainly,” replied Marie; “ it will be most politic,—you will then be in a better humour. Who is it that says a favour should never be asked till after dinner?—and your substantial English breakfast will answer nearly as well.”

The meal passed in solemn silence. Lord

Avonleigh felt that he ought not to talk in his character of an afflicted father. Buckingham was equally obliged to discretion as an anxious lover. De Joinville gave up speaking when he found nobody listened—their not answering he might have excused; and Madame de Soissons was quiet from pure impatience.

“Really, there is such a dead calm,” at last exclaimed the Duke, “that I begin to be apprehensive of a storm: it is quite ominous. Who among us are likely to quarrel first?” glancing at the corner of the table where Hortense and Meilley were seated, as usual, talking in whispers, and as indifferent as they well could be to the very existence of the rest of the company.

“Quarrels!” said Charles; “do not use so disagreeable a word. I am thinking of nothing but the thanks I owe Lord Avonleigh for his hospitality”—Lord Avonleigh bent to the very edge of the table—“and the favours I am about to ask.”

“It is coming,” thought Marie.

“Now, your Lordship,” continued Charles, “must not send me away a disappointed guest; pray allow Lady Francesca to be summoned hither. I am aware,” added he, interrupting her father’s attempt to speak, that “the lady’s only illness is

your displeasure. Sufficient cause, I am sure; but one which I hope to remove."

Lord Avonleigh looked aghast, and, never very ready with his own resources, endeavoured to catch Buckingham's eye, but in vain. The Duke's attention was fixed on Madame de Soissons; their eyes met, and both laughed. His volatile temper was already caught with the absurdity of having been so outwitted, and Lord Avonleigh's consternation was ample recompense. He resolved he should get through it as he could.

"May we take your silence for consent?" asked Charles, after a pause.

"Your Grace has been strangely deceived—the Lady Francesca is too ill to leave her room." Lord Avonleigh had not tact enough to perceive that the truth would now have been his best policy.

"Nay," replied Charles, gravely, "this is carrying your anger too far. Allow me to mediate between you. I must entreat, nay, I command, the Lady Francesca's presence."

"Your Grace's commands are absolute," said Lord Avonleigh, as he perceived that Buckingham would not come to his assistance, and found, as he could not trust to the Duke, he must trust to chance. "Take the key of the south gallery,"

he said to an attendant, "and tell the Lady Francesca that it is the King's wish to see her, and that she has my permission to leave her apartment."

Lord Avonleigh had decided on taking refuge in wounded dignity, when he was again addressed by the King.

"The Castle holds another prisoner, to whom I intend extending the best prerogative of my crown—mercy. Will you order Robert Evelyn to be brought before me?"

Lord Avonleigh bowed in sullen silence, and, turning to his page, bade him desire that the prisoner might forthwith be conducted to the royal presence.

"Avonleigh is more puzzled than I am," whispered Buckingham, who had drawn to Madame de Soissons' side. "I can assure you that my anger is merged in admiration."

"Suppose," said Marie, "that we make peace? and, as a reward, I will tell you the whole history."

The Duke answered, "Agreed."

When the prisoner was brought into the room, Charles looked for a moment admiringly on the graceful figure and noble bearing of the youth who entered, and then said, "Give him his sword

—Mr. Evelyn, you are free: I pardon you for the sake of others, and will consider their intercession sufficient pledge for your loyalty.”

Evelyn, bewildered by the sudden change, sunk on his knee, and silently kissed the King's extended hand; he strove to speak his thanks, the words died upon his lips; but attention was drawn from his emotion by the entrance of Francesca. She was dressed in her black novice's robe, whose large loose folds suited so well the simple dignity of her air. Her hair was just parted on her forehead, and gathered up in a single knot behind. She was pale as marble; but her large eyes had an unnatural and feverish brightness; and when she came into the room, and perceived Evelyn, a crimson flush for a moment passed over her countenance, but left it even paler than before. She hesitated, and he was that instant at her side. He took her hand, and led her, scarce conscious, across the room. “Kneel, my bride, my beloved!” said he, in a whisper, “and thank our Sovereign for a life which is indeed precious for your sake.”

Francesca sank at the King's feet; but before she could speak, he raised her from the ground, and said, “Why, this is strange bridal attire, my beautiful nun!”

“ My sad and solemn garb is a custom of my country,” replied Francesca. “ What can be so fitting as a religious dress for a time of tribulation, sorrow, and farewell ?”

“ No talk of farewell now,” exclaimed Madame de Soissons, cordially embracing her friend. “ I am sure your father will consent.”

“ I have really been so little consulted,” answered Lord Avonleigh, “ that any opinion of mine it is as superfluous to ask as to offer.”

“ Nay,” said the King, “ we have done with authority now ; we shall only beg that you will add your pardon to our own.”

“ My father !” exclaimed Francesca, “ I implore you, part from me not with an unkindly feeling. I entreat you to recollect that Robert Evelyn loved me as the lonely and neglected orphan ; that our affection has been tried in every way ; and that, for my sake, he has risked liberty and life. My father, had he perished on the scaffold, the same grave would have held us both !”

“ Come, Lord Avonleigh,” said Charles, “ the house of Evelyn is as noble as your own, and a portion of the estate shall be restored.”

“ Thank you,” said Buckingham, in a low tone, to Madame de Soissons.

“ Pray,” answered she, “ do not let a little miserable earth interfere with our newly formed friendship.”

“ I thank your Grace,” said Evelyn; “ but I ask no boon beyond the life, whose gratitude can end but with itself. Let my father’s house pass from me, even as I am about to pass away from my father’s land. When yonder dearest maiden stood with me before the altar, she knew that she wedded one whose future lot was cast in another place—that I was an exile and a wanderer. The plan which I formed thoughtfully, I adhere to steadily. I am still bound to my brave companions; far across the ocean we will seek an altar and a home. For the faith which we profess we are ready to encounter every danger. We go in the name of God, and we believe he will guide us in safety through the wilderness. To-night we sail!”

“ He is mad!” exclaimed Lord Avonleigh. “ At all events, you, Francesca, will not go with him?”

She answered by placing her hand in Evelyn’s, and standing in silence at his side.

CHAPTER XLIII.

“ C'est qu'on n'a pas pour tout partage
 De soupirer et de rêver ;
 Que sur l'océan sans rivage
 Il faut poursuivre son voyage,
 Dût-on ne jamais arriver.”

ST. BEUVE.

It was but a few hours after the preceding scene that a party were seen issuing from the gates of Avonleigh Castle. Two horses stood saddled, ready ; but before Evelyn assisted his bride to mount, she turned to embrace Madame de Soissons, who had accompanied her to the portal. “ God bless you ! ” exclaimed she, in a faltering voice. “ Think of me sometimes, and Heaven above knows that my heart will beat with the remembrance of your kindness till it lies cold in death.” Francesca then sprung on her horse, and in a few minutes they had crossed the path, and were hidden by the forest ; once again they appeared on a winding turn of the road ; again the boughs closed round them, and shut them out from those who watched them—for ever.

It was long before Madame de Soissons ceased to gaze upon the road. At length, dashing the last tears from her cheek, she turned with a forced smile to De Joinville, who was standing beside, and said, "Well, there are some things in the world I do not understand; and I neither comprehend Evelyn's going to America, nor Francesca's accompanying him;"—and with this speech we take our farewell of the Comtesse, who went back to Paris, and passed an active life of court intrigue, which was generally successful:—the chief incident of her after-life was a brief exile for an impertinent speech to Madame de Vallière.

The Chevalier de Joinville lived to an advanced age, and was considered a very amusing old gentleman; he was sometimes advised to write his memoirs, but, as he justly observed, he had a character to lose.

Lord Avonleigh married again, and, with that singular good-fortune which never deserted him, except in the instance of his son, who was perhaps the one great sacrifice to Fate, was very fortunate in his choice, for his lady was pretty, obedient, and an excellent nurse. He took to good eating and the gout; and even Albert was as much forgotten as Francesca and her mother.

Charles Aubyn and Lucy vegetated in quiet

content. The young and enthusiastic preacher taming down into an accommodating conformist, one who felt that the interests of his own living and of the church in general were indissolubly connected. He dined constantly at the Castle, and was always considered a very worthy and respectable individual. Lucy herself made a valuable discovery, namely, that she had delicate health,—only those who have this perpetual interest in themselves can understand its enjoyment,—and what with complaints, symptoms, remedies, and ground-ivy tea, it was quite wonderful how time passed unobserved away. It is on such as these that life lavishes its favours; these are they of the light heart, and yet lighter mind, for whose sake the earth, to whose base clay they are so near allied, puts forth her best; these are they who have the corn and wine of existence. What know they of the sensitive temper which makes its own misery?—of the deep feeling that cannot change?—of the hope that looks too high, whose bright wings melt in the glorious flight, and is dashed to pieces in its rude collision with the common and the actual? What know they of that feverish impatience of the littleness of society, which takes refuge amid the dreams of a haunted solitude, from which it only ventures forth to have

those dreams destroyed? What know they of these?—Nothing, nothing; and in their ignorance are they happy!

A graver page than this, that of history, records the further career which awaited some who have been recalled in this brief chronicle of their earlier time. Power and indulgence harden, corrupt, and assimilate their possessors; and as they drew near and more near to the close, the characters of Louis and of Charles took stronger shades of resemblance. The indolent good-nature of the one lapsed into the most reckless selfishness; and throughout our English annals there is no portion more disgraceful than the latter years of Charles's reign; and assuredly the same censure may be passed on those of Louis,—periods of personal and of national degradation.

But we have now done with all those who have taken part in these pages, save of the two whose fortunes and characters they have endeavoured principally to illustrate; and they have yet a long wild voyage to perform.

A feeling of gladness and freedom long unknown animated them as they rode through the forest; the future was before them—that future of which they now spake together. Together!—the perfect happiness of that one word! An hour's

quick riding — for time was precious — brought them to Southampton. A boat was in waiting at the quay, and in a few minutes they were on board the vessel destined to convey them to America. The breeze was favourable, and the white sails were soon spread — a mighty sea-bird ruffling its snowy plumage in the sunset. The town of Southampton, with its old castle, and older trees, shone red in the gleam of the parting day ; and the west was heaped with huge crimson masses, contending with a vast black shadow that rested on their verge. Beyond lay the fair green island, so tranquil in the cool calm atmosphere, only flickered by a few of the lightest clouds. “ England, dear England, farewell for ever ! ” exclaimed Evelyn, as he leant on the side of the ship, and gazed on the lovely undulations of that native land whither he was to return no more.

CHAPTER XLIV.

“ Of winds and waves the strangely mingled sounds
Ride heavily, the night wind’s hollow sweep,
Mocking the sounds of human lamentation.”

Bertram.

“ The be all, and the end all here.”

SHAKESPEARE.

Two hours had passed, the fierce crimson of the west had burnt itself away, and the huge black clouds had gathered in darker array, broken by gleams of meteoric light. The moon had risen, but with a dim haze around her troubled circle, and her face was only seen at intervals, so rapidly did the hurrying vapours sweep by. The fresh sea-breeze had sank to rest, yet the billows heaved ; and every now and then a warm gust, unnatural and brief, stirred the sails, and at each return with increased strength. Most of its inmates were sleeping in that ship, worn out with the toils of the day, and still more with the sorrow of parting, dreaming of that roof which would never shelter their hours of rest again. But some of the seamen watched the lowering heaven with unquiet eyes ; and their captain knew that for him there was no

sleep that night. There was silence on the deck, and gravity on the faces usually careless as that of a child; but each one was now mutely preparing for the coming hour of peril.

Two only in that vessel had neither sought the rest of the passengers nor shared the anxiety of the seamen. Evelyn had never moved from the ship's side, but leant there, one arm encircling Francesca, while he drew her attention to many a familiar object, and many a recollection of his youth. His heart had gone back to the past, but it had drawn hers along with it. At length, not even his watchful eye could discern the shadowy line that rested on the far horizon,—a cloud passed over the moon,—he had looked his last on England. Not till that moment did he know what it was to part from a country that had been, that was, so precious in his sight. He stood silent, and hid his face; while Francesca marked her sympathy by silence as deep as his own. Suddenly he turned towards her, and exclaimed,—

“ Francesca, do you ever think of Italy?”

“ Yes,” said she tenderly, “ as the place where we first met.”

“ Pardon me, dearest,” whispered he, drawing her closer to his heart, “ that one thought can wander from my present and perfect happiness;

but I leave the best hopes of a life behind me in quitting England. Henceforth my father's house will be desolate. Two nights ago I visited those noble halls for the last time. I heard that the court minion into whose hands they have passed had given orders that they should be pulled down. Heaven knows where those stately portraits will be displayed on which I have so often gazed, some legend of knightly faith attached to each!—to what base uses will those time-honoured arches, those windows of coloured light, those panels of carved oak, be applied! Francesca, this must seem strange weakness to you; but there is not a stone in these old walls, about to be levelled with the ground, which has not some association of gone-by hope and lingering memory that wind round the heart, despite of every effort to forget them."

"And why forget?" replied Francesca. "We shall love to talk of England in the far country to which we are hastening."

The conversation was here interrupted by a burst of thunder above their heads, and a huge wave dashing over the deck, while the vessel reeled beneath the shock.

"Better take the lady below," said a sailor.

Francesca cast an imploring look upon Evelyn. Let me stay by your side—I am not afraid!"

Evelyn hesitated, when the captain again urged her descent,—“ You can only be in the way, lady.”

She contested the point no longer, but allowed herself to be conducted to the cabin. It was a scene of strange confusion. The shock which sent the ship rolling amid the waters had roused the passengers from their short rest, and they crowded together with pale faces of anxiety and terror. The storm, which had long been gathering, swept at last over sea and sky. More than night rested on the waters,—darkness made yet more deep by the fiery blaze which ever and anon kindled the horizon. And when that died away, the black cloud and blacker wave were mocked by a phosphoric sparkle, like the meteors which in some damp churchyard gleam from the grave. The seamen, with every eye fixed, and every hand strained, were the fortunate; but wo for the wretches cooped in the cabin below, surrounded by an unaccustomed danger,—and fear is most terrible when strange. They were home-bred people, who had never dreamt but of dying quietly in their beds,—who had lived amid green fields, and in small and pleasant villages,—and who, after they had thought of death, had softened the image of old age by prayer breathed from lips beloved

in the last extremity, and tears that soothed the pillow on which they fell. But now death came sudden, dreadful, and strange. The wind howled around their prison-house, the waves clamoured aloud for their prey, and every peal of thunder seemed the signal of destruction. Some tried to pray, but their thoughts were confused, the old familiar words had passed from their mind; some wept hysterical and unnatural tears, that fell for themselves; and some sat on the floor stupid with terror. One, an old man, so old that his shadow rested even on his grave, raved aloud, and reproached the Lord, who had thus deserted his people in their time of need. Near him was another, who held an almost empty flask, and was humming a joyous song, which, from his now serious and staid character, must have been forgotten for many a year; and between the two lay a child fast asleep, the little rosy cheek pillowed upon the arm, half lost in the curls of fair hair. The shocks, which laid the ship almost under the sea, grew less frequent; the thunder, heard at long intervals, now threatened in the atmosphere afar off; when Francesca rose from her knee, and resolved to seek the deck again. The oppression of the cabin was stifling, and Evelyn had left her; she could not bear his absence, and

she followed him. The pale, chill glimmering of earliest morning was faint in the east, from which the clouds were slowly breaking; there was just light enough to enable her to find her way. At once her eye fell upon Evelyn, speaking to the captain, who stood with folded arms, and a resolute, but desperate air, while he answered with obvious reluctance;—she caught the last few words, —“I know the channel well; and where yonder gleam of red light rests upon the water are rocks, and on those rocks we strike before another quarter of an hour is over!”—and the seaman walked away, as if unwilling to be further questioned. Evelyn felt a light touch upon his arm—it was Francesca. Again, in silence, they approached the side of the ship, and Evelyn averted his face; he could not bear to look on the beautiful and the devoted—the bride whom he had won but to lose. He shuddered as he pored on the dark and heaving waves, so soon to close over them.

“God of Heaven!” exclaimed he aloud; “and it is for my sake that she is here!”

“Yes, Evelyn!” said Francesca, in a voice of touching sweetness, but calm—not one accent changed. “Yes: and here I am happy. Whatever be the world of which yonder dark sea is the portal, we shall seek it together. It has been

upon me from my earliest childhood—a longing for another sphere. I knew that this earth was not my home—that here hopes and affections were to be blighted and to die. Heaven has restored us to each other ; it wills that our future be eternal. A deep and a sweet repose is in my heart at this moment, and I wait, as at an altar, that fate which is not of this life.”

He gazed on her large bright eyes, raised for one moment to the sky, whose light was within them. They were uplifted but for that moment, and then turned upon him ; from his face they moved no more. Suddenly they were flung with violence against the side where they leant. The vessel shivered like a living thing, and planks and joints flew asunder with a sound which echoed far across the waters. One wild shriek, the cry of many voices, arose to heaven ; but in vain ! Again the panting waves lifted the shattered vessel on high ; again it was dashed on the hidden rock ;—this time it rose no more, and the last of life’s agony was lost beneath the unfathomable sea !

Let the waves sweep over them ! Better the dark, silent, and fated waves of ocean, than the troubled waves of life. There are some whose sojourn on this earth is brief as it is bitter. For

such the world keeps the wasted affection, the hope destroyed, the energy that preys upon itself, the kindly feeling unrequited, and the love that asks for happiness and finds despair or death. The lots in this existence are unequal. Some pass along a path predestined to weariness and tears. Such a destiny have I here recorded; and ere its truth be denied, I pray those who may turn these pages to think of those they have known, and their memory will witness for me. The kindest, the loveliest, the best, whom they can remember—has not life for them poured forth from its darkest cup?—have not they known the broken heart and the early grave? Such natures belong not to our soil—they are of another sphere; and it is mercy when Heaven recalls its own.

THE END.

LONDON:

J. MOYES, CASTLE STREET, LEICESTER SQUARE.







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Landon, Letitia Elizabeth
Francesca Carrara

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